National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, tests publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30.

NL-339 (r. 88/04)

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911 - 1939

by

Catherine Cooper Cole

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

Department of History

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1988

Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

L'autorisation a été accordée à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur (titulaire du droit d'auteur) se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation écrite.

ISBN 0-315-45563-2

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Catherine Cooper Cole

TITLE OF THESIS: Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911-1939

DEGREE: Master of Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: Fall 1988

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Catherine Cooper Cole

(Student's Signature)

CATHERINE COOPER COLE

(Student's permanent address)

100 #3 93 STREET

EDMONTON, ALBERTA T5H 1W6

Date: August 30, 1988

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911-1939
submitted by Catherine Cooper Cole
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

David M. Hill
Supervisor

Dated: June 23 1988

ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century the beginnings of a strong garment manufacturing industry were apparent in Edmonton. The story of garment manufacturing in Edmonton contrasts with the common images of sweatshops, homework, ethnic division and gender exploitation. Rather, it is a story of manufacturers, caught up in the spirit of boosterism, with a vision of the future, and workers whose primary concern was providing their families with food, clothing and shelter.

Labour relations were harmonious as demonstrated by the lack of labour disputes or strikes in the period. Labour legislation, first developed in 1917, just six years after the establishment of the first, and largest, garment manufacturing firm, provided for the protection of workers generally, and women specifically. The unionization of Great Western Garment under the United Garment Workers of America established standards of working conditions and wages that were comparative throughout the industry in Edmonton.

This study provides an introduction to garment manufacturing in Edmonton between 1911 and 1939, outlines the development of some of the more important manufacturing firms and provides insight into government legislation and labour relations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. David Mills for his encouragement, input and suggestions; my colleagues Marian Brown, former Curator of Industrial History and Sandra Morton-Weizman, former Curator of Social History at the Provincial Museum of Alberta for their support, particularly in the early stages of the project; the many people associated with the garment manufacturing industry who gave generously of their time including Max Bedard, Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Chambres, Géorgina Graff, Ivy Grimstead, Louis Kabesh, LeRoy LaFleche Sr., Arthur McIntyre, Lillian Morris, Anne Ozipko, Elizabeth Shinbine, Kerry Sprung, Dan Starko, Roberta Watson and Julie White; Daphne O'Connor for her patience and word processing; and my family, particularly my husband, Gordon Wood, and my daughter Jessica for their co-operation and encouragement.

Funding for this research was provided, in part, through grants from the Alberta Museums Association, from monies supplied through the Western Canada Lotteries, and the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

1. Introduction: Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911-1939 1

Footnotes.....12

2. The Development of the Industries in the United States 14

Footnotes.....27

3. The Alberta Perspective:
Laying the Foundation for Industrial Growth, 1906-1926.....29

Footnotes.....58

4. Labour's Response, 1911-1935.....60

Footnotes.....87

5. The Government's Role, 1917-1933.....90

Footnotes.....107

6. The Depression and Garment Manufacturing.....110

Footnotes.....124

Conclusion.....126

Bibliography.....130

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
I	Weekly Wages of Employees in Garment Manufacturing Companies to those in other Manufacturing Positions, 1925 - 1927	64
II	Comparison of Numbers of Employed Juveniles to Total Number of People Employed Generally and in Manufacturing Specifically, 1921	65
III	Comparison of Wages of Juveniles to Workers of all Ages, 1921 and 1931	66

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.	LaFleche Bros., exterior, Edmonton, 1916	32
2.	LaFleche Bros., store interior, Edmonton, 1920	33
3.	LaFleche Bros., store interior, Edmonton, 1920	34
4.	Emery Manufacturing Co., exterior 1914	38
5.	Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1913	39
6.	Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1913	40
7.	Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1928	44
8.	Emery Manufacturing Co., machine room, 1928	45
9.	Emery Manufacturing Co., cutting room, 1928	46
10.	G.W.G. exterior 1917	50
11.	G.W.G. exterior 1918	51
12.	G.W.G. staff cafeteria, 1919	52
13.	G.W.G. staff picnic, 1928	53
14.	G.W.G. cutting room, 1913	76
15.	G.W.G. interior, 1911	77
16.	G.W.G. interior, 1911	78
17.	G.W.G. interior, 1916	79
18.	G.W.G. interior, 1916	80
19.	G.W.G. workroom, 1920	81
20.	G.W.G. workroom, 1920	82
21.	A.F.L. convention, 1928	99
22.	G.W.G. exterior, 1937	122
23.	G.W.G. staff, 1939	124

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911-1939

The Province of Alberta does not immediately come to mind as one of the centres of garment manufacturing in North America. Alberta has traditionally had an agricultural and resource-based economy with limited secondary manufacturing. Within Canada, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg are all recognized as more significant garment manufacturing areas than either Edmonton or Calgary, although at one time Alberta had some firms that could rival those in Eastern Canada.

In the early twentieth century the beginnings of a strong manufacturing sector were apparent in Alberta. The establishment and growth of workwear companies, Sprung Clindinin and Great Western Garment; ladieswear companies, Hatchwear and Emery Manufacturing; made-to-measure uniform companies, Reynolds Manufacturing and General Whitewear; knitted goods companies, including Calgary, Caldwell and Edmonton Knitting; and relatively large tailoring companies such as LaFleche Brothers and J. A. Mitchell; reflect the vitality of apparel manufacturing. During the Second World War, moreover, Edmonton boasted the home of the largest work clothing manufacturing company in the British Commonwealth.[1] Today, Alberta's image as a garment manufacturing centre seems bright as relatively young companies like Sun Ice, manufacturers of sportswear for the Calgary Olympics in 1988, gain higher national profiles, while older companies such as Emery Manufacturing exert a new strength through adapting to current demand.

The interest that historians have shown in garment manufacturing has been primarily in the volatile, large-scale manufacturing firms of

Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. For example, descriptions of the work environment of textile workers, boot and shoe industry workers and garment workers found in books such as Michael Cross's The Workingman in the Nineteenth Century and I. Abella and D. Millar's The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century are typical of the image of garment manufacturing. They focus upon sweatshops, homework, and industrial disputes - situations that have little relevance to Alberta. In an excerpt from Walsh's Magazine, published in Toronto in 1895-1896, a sweatshop was described as follows:

> ... a dozen men and as many women are crowded together into a room not too large for two persons, ill-lighted, unheated, unventilated; where women work night and day making trousers at sixty cents a dozen pairs; where young girls work long hours for no pay, that they may learn the business; where girls are not even respected, but are sworn at and driven by brutal task masters, the conditions are not the most desireable.[2]

Similarly, descriptions of speed-ups, like the one at Eaton's from 1929-34, where piece-work rates were reduced and more work was required from employees, do not fit the situation in this province. Efficiency experts with stop watches and lists to compare employee productivity were not techniques employed in Edmonton's firms.

Descriptions of the decimation of craftsmanship as mechanization and assembly line techniques reduced the need for skilled labour also abound in labour historiography. However this image cannot be applied to Alberta as assembly line techniques with extensive division of labour were not used to any extent before World War II.[3] Certainly machine operators did not have to be highly skilled dressmakers or seamstresses; although the companies worked on a piece-work rate, the garments were largely made individually during this period. Great Western Garment led the way in terms of developing assembly line techniques in Edmonton, as

construction was broken down into a number of processes; but the firm did not divide labour to the extent that Eastern firms did. Thus the workers experienced some of the satisfaction of craftsmanship.

There were, however, some parallels. A Montreal machinist in a cotton factory, when asked whether the factory searched for workers in the country, replied,

> In our factory I have no knowledge that they went to seek for them, but I know there were those who came from the other factory, whom they had sent agents to search for. I know that there was a Mr. Gideon Thibaudeau, for whom they searched in the Saguenay, but I cannot exactly say where. They called them 'the Saguenay' at the factory.[4]

Similarly, a retired machinist from Great Western Garment described how Ukrainians from the St. Paul region were encouraged to move to Edmonton to work in the factory.[5] A number of informants commented about how hard working the Ukrainians were.[6] Here the similarity ends though; the Ukrainians were not brought in to work for lower wages or to allow the factory to discharge old hands.

Researchers have shown some interest in related industries, studying various aspects of the textile and boot and shoe industries, particularly in Quebec. The work of Jacques Rouillard, Gail Cuthbert-Brandt, Jacques P. Mathieu, and Jacques Ferland examines aspects of textile labour.[7] As well the work of Michael Piva and Joy Parr focusses on workers in the textile industries in Ontario.[8] Their research is relevant to garment manufacturing only in so far as it provides indications of conditions for women in manufacturing generally as garment and textile manufacturing are different industries.

Little has been written about the garment manufacturing industries, particularly as they existed beyond Central Canada. N. M. Davidson's thesis, "Montreal's Dominance of the Canadian Men's Fine Clothing

Industry," is one of the few studies of Canadian garment manufacturing. He noted that the number of men's fine clothing (suits, pants, overcoats) establishments in Montreal increased from 77 to 102 between the years 1911 and 1937, whereas "the changes in the number of establishments in the West and the Maritimes are not considered pertinent."[9] He quickly dismissed the fine clothing industry outside of Central Canada. Granted, there were only a couple of fine clothing establishments in Edmonton at the time. They may not have been pertinent in a national context but they were important to Edmonton.

The Manitoba government is currently undertaking a study of garment manufacturing in Winnipeg. Winnipeg was included in Edmonton manufacturers' concerns about competition with Eastern Canadian firms, particularly because Winnipeg and Edmonton were both centres for the production of workwear. Oral histories of women working in factories in Winnipeg have been conducted and two articles about women's work in the years 1929-1970 have been published.[10] To date little other information is available about the industry in Manitoba.

Although labour historians and women's historians are starting to consider women's work within the garment and textile industries, museum curators and folklorists have not yet turned their attention to manufactured clothing. In their annotated bibliography, "Costume in Canada," Jacqueline Beaudoin-Ross and Pamela Blackstock outline various approaches to the study of costume history in Canada. Quebec authors have traditionally focussed on costumes as a manifestation of folk culture, but "Very little was ever mentioned of such topics as fashionable costume in the nineteenth century, as their main interest remained costume of the French Regime and rural clothing."[11] In

Newfoundland the folklore approach is also prevalent. In Ontario, where most authors are curators of costume collections, publications are primarily descriptive. Material historians have looked primarily at cut and construction; and recent work has been directed towards costume reproduction:

> The blending of artifact analysis into the larger social history context has been attempted, with varying degrees of success, by most authors. Most museums now display costume as a tool to interpret local history, instead of as an end in itself.[12]

However, most museums are just beginning to consider artifacts associated with the events of the twentieth century. Therefore, costume curators have paid little attention to mass manufactured clothing.

Research that has been undertaken in Western Canada has also been directed largely towards historic sites or museum projects although studies, particularly by students of historic clothing and textiles in the Faculty of Home Economics at the University of Alberta, are also of interest. Dianne Smith's recent thesis, "Dressmaking Occupations in Edmonton, 1900-1930," provides insight into small scale production during the period which allows some useful comparisons with mass manufactured clothing.[13]

Business historians and social historians have not focussed upon the garment industries in Western Canada. Michael Bliss' Northern Enterprise provides the general context but does not get into specifics, particularly in Edmonton. Similarly Gerald Friesen's The Canadian Prairies and Alan Artibise's Town and City serve to provide a picture of the conditions that garment manufacturing was developing within but do not address the industry itself. Local histories such as Warren Caragata's Alberta Labour and J. G. MacGregor's Edmonton also provide only contextual information.[14]

This study will be limited to an examination of firms producing workwear, clothing, ladieswear, knitted goods, large scale tailoring and made-to-measure uniforms. There were numerous independent dressmakers, tailors and milliners, plus a corset manufacturer; although these people had some things in common with workers in garment manufacturing, the differences (level of skill required, capital invested, machinery and overhead costs) were significant. The only other needle trade that was significant in Alberta at the time was the fur trade and it had little in common with the others as it made fewest concessions to the machine age.[15] (Dressmaking and tailoring were also highly skilled trades but with a custom made product). This study will also focus on companies sharing a number of common characteristics: sales throughout Western Canada, staffs of workers with varying skill levels; operations requiring an investment of capital in machinery and supplies; and products that, whether made-to-measure or mass produced, were garments. The textile industries, the manufacture of cloth, will not be addressed.

The parameters of the study are defined by the date of the establishment of Edmonton's (and indeed Alberta's) first and largest manufacturing company, Great Western Garment in 1911, and 1939, the beginning of World War II. This period was marked first by years of optimism and then during the 1930s by depression; expansion, followed by stagnation. World War II marked the end of some companies, due to wartime shortages, and the expansion of others through government contracts.

The data available has been limited to some extent by events such as fires that destroyed business records; the many moves most companies have experienced over the years, with the resulting disposal of

documents and artifacts; and the lack of personal diaries and papers for the period. However, the records of the Departments of Labour and Consumer and Corporate Affairs, directories, company advertising, promotional material, photographs, artifacts, plus the recollections of retired employees have been utilized to form as complete a picture of the industries in these years as possible. A systematic review of the Edmonton Journal for the years 1911-1920 and significant periods in later years provided valuable information about the companies themselves, as well as a less tangible but equally valuable sense of how important these industries were to the development of Edmonton.

A number of factors affected the success or failure of apparel manufacturing concerns in Edmonton. Conditions within the industry were volatile:

> Because the apparel trades are so easy of entry, many men with little capital, limited experience, and poor managerial ability seek to enter, bringing with them obsolete equipment and methods and a complete innocence of the mysteries of cost accounting. The business mortality rate is correspondingly high, the average life of a men's clothing firm, for example, being only seven years.[16]

Many companies founded in Alberta during the period before World War II lasted two or three years before closing or changing their role (for example, from manufacturing to wholesaling.)

Which needle trade one entered, and where the operation was based, made a significant difference in determining the success or failure of the enterprise. A number of distinct industries form the needle trades. Men's apparel is broken down by clothing (men's suits, overcoats, sports coats and separate trousers); furnishings (shirts, ties, underwear, socks and pajamas); heavy outerwear (windbreakers, snowsuits, ski-jackets and similar items of sportswear); and workclothes (workshirts, overalls etc.).[17] Ladieswear consisted of the cotton dress industry,

silk dress industry, undergarments and nightwear, infants' and children's outerwear, corsets and allied garments, blouses, neckwear and scarves. Other needle trades include the knit goods industry, the millinery industry and the fur trade. Each industry was determined by the range of machinery required, the production methods utilized, factory layout and necessary skills.

Distinctions in Alberta were often blurred as a workwear company might expand into production of dress shirts for a few years or a cotton dress company might produce a line of silk dresses. In fact it is difficult to compile a complete list of garment manufacturing companies because they were listed under so many different headings in the directories. One year a company would be listed as an overall manufacturer, and the next year it would be considered a shirt, blouse and overall manufacturer; the following year it might be found under men's clothing-wholesalers.[18]

Geographic location also affected the success of the enterprise. The difficulties and expense associated with bringing in machinery, fabrics and supplies determined what branch of the industry would be developed in Edmonton:

> Where style rather than price is the important consideration in sales ... the manufacturer must be near the centre of the industry [New York]. Other considerations are the need for more highly skilled labour on the better type of product, and the availability of raw materials and accessories on short notice.[19]

When producing stylish garments timing was critical. One had to develop the designs, acquire the materials quickly and have the expertise necessary to manufacture the garments. In addition to factors routinely affecting the industry such as changes in demand, fashion and the economy, Albertans also had to contend with competition from established

Eastern Canadian and American firms and mail order companies. Edmonton had the further disadvantage of competition from Calgary for the provincial market.

In drawing comparisons between London, New York and Montreal, N. M. Davidson noted that each city is the largest urban centre in its respective country as well as the leading clothing centre. He traced the growth of these cities to

> their physical location, access to hinterland and consequent development as industrial and commercial centres. Each city has a port which is a point-of-entry for immigrants, the transportation network enveloping around them giving speedy access to most locations.[20]

When focussing on manufacturing before 1911, he stressed the exploitation of labour as a critical factor in establishing the foundation of Montreal's garment manufacturing industry:

> A very important advantage which the Montreal firms had during this early period was the exploitation of the abundant cheap unskilled rural labour for the manufacture of low price ready-made clothes. In 1898, a high percentage of the clothes made-up for Montreal's wholesale clothiers and factories was by rural workers, some of them located 40 miles or more from the city. In contrast, the firms in Toronto and Hamilton employed very few rural workers. The home workers which they employed were confined largely to the city and its suburbs. Toronto firms had neither the same compulsion to exploit the rural labour supply nor the same opportunity.[21]

Similarly, Edmonton's firms did not use the homework system to any extent nor did they exploit their workers in the way that Eastern manufacturers did. Edmonton lacked an identifiable immigrant group within garment manufacturing and local entrepreneurs recognized their limitations in terms of having a small skilled labour force and their distance from the style centres; they capitalized upon them by producing everyday goods for local consumption.[22]

A number of garment manufacturing firms were established in Edmonton

between 1911 and 1929. Great Western Garment was the largest company but smaller concerns such as Emery, Reynolds, Courtney and Northwestern Manufacturing were all established during this period. LaFleche Bros. had been established previously in Strathcona but moved to the garment manufacturing area of Edmonton and expanded its role during this period. Government support was important in the early years in terms of boosterism and labour legislation. Questions such as hours of labour and handicapping of the minimum wage were resolved in cooperation with business rather than labour as both local and provincial governments attempted to provide an atmosphere conducive to the development of industry.

In the Depression cooperation between manufacturers and employees became increasingly important in maintaining existing firms and initiating new ventures. In some ways, the Depression encouraged new growth in the industries rather than crippling them. F. R. Scott and H. M. Cassidy noted in their 1935 study, Labor Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry, that:

> The fact that small firms can enter the industry so easily explains the apparent paradox of numbers of new enterprises appearing in the midst of the depression. There are always men who think they can make good where others have failed. Particularly in time of depression, when the clothing foreman, or designer, or skilled worker, loses a regular job, he is tempted to sink what little capital he may have into an independent venture in the hope that it will bring him at least some return until he can obtain work again at good wages.[23]

Moreover Alberta firms concentrated on the production of goods like workwear; for example, housedresses were manufactured for the local market in both Edmonton and Calgary. Joel Seidman's description of the cotton dress industry in the United States can also be applied to the situation in Alberta:

> The cotton wash dress, the country cousin of the fashionable silk dress, had been made in small towns and larger cities far from the style centre by poorly paid, relatively little skilled workers. Making a virtue of its defects, however, the cotton dress industry developed substantial, well-managed firms which produced well-made standard garments, and sold them widely with the aid of promotion campaigns and brand names.[24]

Serious studies need to be undertaken of garment manufacturing in major and minor centres throughout Canada in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the industry on a national level. Cities outside Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg also had significant industrial development and warrant attention. Although the stories of smaller centres are not as sensational or controversial, they are important in providing an understanding of the complex nature of the industry. American historians have undertaken studies of selected aspects of garment manufacturing both in major centres and in the midwest. It is, therefore, American sources rather than Canadian sources that were useful in providing a framework for this study.

This paper will outline the development of garment manufacturing firms in Edmonton between 1911-1939 and will introduce Alberta's labour legislation as it applied to the industry. The relationships between labour, management and government will be considered. Evidence suggests that the industry developed along unique lines in Edmonton and was quite different from the images evoked by descriptions of conflict within Eastern Canada and the United States.

Footnotes

1 "G.W.G. Limited The History of a Western Canadian Giant," unpublished report 24 April, 1974.

2 "How the Sweatshop System began: 'Homework' in Toronto K[nights]. of [Labour]; 'Where Labor is Not Prayer', Walsh's Magazine (Toronto, 1895-6), pp. 111-16." In Irving Abella and David Millar eds. The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 154.

3 "The Machine and the Craftsman." Canada, Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in Canada, 1889. Evidence-Quebec, pp.364-5 in Michael S. Cross, ed. The Workingman in the Nineteenth Century, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 91-2.

4 "Child Labour" Ibid., pp. 96-7.

5 Interview with Max Bedard.

6 Interviews with Max Bedard, Georgina Graff and Lillian Morris.

7 See Jacques Rouillard, Les traveilleurs du coton du Quebec, 1900-1915, Quebec: Presses de l'Universite du Quebec, 1974); Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving it Together: Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1950" in Labour/Le Traveilleur, 7 (Spring, 1981), pp. 113-135; and Jacques Ferland, "When the cotton mills 'girls' struck for the first time: a study of female militancy in the cotton and shoe factories of Quebec (1880-1910)" unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, 1986.

8 See Michael Piva, The Conditions of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979); and Joy Parr, Disaggregating the sexual division of labour: a transatlantic case study, (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1987).

9 N. M. Davidson, "Montreal's Dominance of the Canadian Men's Fine Clothing Industry," (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1969), p.49.

10 See James D. Mochoruk and Donna Weber, "Women in the Winnipeg Garment Trade, 1929-45," and Annalee Lepp, David Millar and Barbara Roberts, "Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry, 1950s-1970s," In Mary Kinnear, Ed. First days, Fighting days: Women in Manitoba History, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1987), pp. 134-148.

11 Jacqueline Beaudoin-Ross and Pamela Blackstock "Costume in Canada: An Annotated Bibliography." Material History Bulletin (National Museums of Canada), Volume 19, 1984, p. 61.

12 Ibid, p. 62.

[13] Dianne Smith, "Dressmaking Occupations in Edmonton, 1900-1930," (M.Sc. thesis, University of Alberta, 1987).

[14] See Michael Bliss, Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987); Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984); Alan Artibise, Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981); Warren Carragata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1979); and J. G. MacGregor, Edmonton: A History, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1967, 1975).

[15] Joel Seidman, The Needle Trades. (New York: Farrar and Rinehard Inc., 1942-1970), p.36.

[16] Ibid, p.12.

[17] Harry A. Cobrin, The men's clothing industry: colonial through modern times. (New York: Fairchild Publications Ltd., 1970), p. 5.

[18] Courtney Manufacturing, Great Western Garment and Northwestern Manufacturing all appeared in the Henderson's Directory under various headings from year to year.

[19] Seidman, p.9.

[20] Davidson, p.24.

[21] Ibid., p. 36.

[22] Michael Bliss noted this trend in the early years of Canadian manufacturing generally as the production of items such as clothing, shoes, furniture, beverages and tools was directed towards local markets. See Northern Enterprise, pp. 225-255.

[23] F. R. Scott and H. M. Cassidy, Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry. (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1935).

[24] Seidman, p. 22.

CHAPTER 2

Context: The Development of the Industries in the United States

Apparel manufacturing in North America began on the Eastern seaboard in the eighteenth century. Initially, the industry focused on menswear. By the mid-nineteenth century boyswear, and a limited range of ladieswear (such as mantles and cloaks), were also available. Menswear developed earlier and more extensively for a variety of reasons. The more standardized cut and styling of garments worn by men meant that it was easier to manufacture ready-made menswear than ready-made ladieswear. The growing demand for quantities of similar garments for men who were soldiers and sailors also spurred developments in technology and production methods. By 1870 it was estimated that the majority of the male population of the United States was wearing ready-made clothing.[1]

The ladieswear industry did not develop until the period after 1860. Perceived reluctance on the part of women to purchase ready-made clothing for themselves due to both the availability of inexpensive dressmakers and the tendency for women of limited incomes to make their own, relatively simple, clothing resulted in the ladies-wear industry lagging considerably behind that of menswear.[2] By the 1870s simple garments such as underwear and wrappers (usually washable housedresses, or morning dresses, worn while doing housework as an alternative to the constrictive and often non-washable fashionable daywear of the period) were available ready-made. With the introduction of the shirtwaist (the forerunner of today's blouse) and skirt in the 1890s, ladieswear became a significant aspect of the ready-made apparel industry because these

garments were simpler in construction and more suited to mass-production. Whereas custom-made clothing allowed the exact fit and complex trims of the late nineteenth century, the nature of ready-made clothing necessitated simpler construction of garments. The uniformity of the shirtwaist and skirt also led to the democratization of women's clothing and the blurring of social distinctions in contrast to the display of clothing as examples of conspicuous consumption apparent in the nineteenth century. In addition, the concentration of manufacturing in the north-eastern United States, for distribution throughout North America, led to the development of a common style and minimized regional variations. At the turn of the century the ready-made apparel industry had overcome its chief obstacle, the stigma of being perceived as cheap, shoddily produced and ill-fitting, and had become an acceptable solution to the need for readily-available, inexpensive, respectable clothing. By 1910, every article of female clothing could be purchased ready-made; Jessica Daves states in Ready-made miracle: the American story of fashion for the millions:

> Looking back on it now, it would seem to be the most obvious thing in the world that women would like to have ready-made dresses; it took the garment makers a comparatively long time to work that out.[3]

By the 1920s they had worked it out. Claudia Kidwell concludes, in Suiting Everyone: the Democratization of Clothing in America, that:

> By the twenties the ready-to-wear clothing industry had reached full maturity. Domestic and imported fabrics in panorama of colors, patterns, and textures were available by the millions of yards. A labour force of divergent skills produced adequate manpower. Machines that could cut hundreds of layers of fabric at one time, machines capable of sewing thousands of stitches a minute, machines that could press any part of a garment with crispness and dispatch were at the disposal of the manufacturer. The manufacturing process itself was structured with a flexibility that allowed organza- tional patterns which

> ranged from individual handwork to assembly-line technique. All the elements for successful mass production were in place.[4]

Thus, by the time industry really got off the ground in Alberta, its form and shape had been determined in the United States. Manufacturers did not need to go through the evolution of industrial methods; Albertan methods were adapted from precedents established in the United States and Eastern Canada.

The growth of the ready-made clothing industry in the United States can be traced to the growth of urban centres, territorial expansion from east to west, improvements in the manufacture of textiles and clothing, and innovations in the production and distribution of wholesale goods.[5] More important, as T. Tuchscherer points out in "Fashion and the Development of the Dress Industry, 1890 - 1930," the two key factors were the invention of the sewing machine and the seemingly inexhaustible supply of immigrants whose skills related to needle trades.[6]

When garments were first available ready-made they were entirely hand made. The invention of the sewing machine in the 1840s and subsequent improvements which met the requirements for producing a successful, practical sewing machine - support for the cloth, a needle to carry the thread through the fabric, a combining device to form the stitch, a feeding mechanism to permit one stitch to follow another, tension control, and a timing mechanism to ensure correct sequence - meant a time saving of fifty percent by the mid 1850s.[7]

> The sewing machine also contributed to the popularity of certain fashions. Ready-made cloaks for women were a business of a few years' standing when the sewing machine was adopted for their manufacture in 1853. Machine sewing reduced the cost of constructing the garment by about eight percent, thereby decreasing its price and increasing its popularity.[8]

In addition to affecting the evolution of fashion, the implementation of

the sewing machine shifted the focus of the industry's labour demand from the skilled to the unskilled worker.[9] It created the possibility of establishing regular clothing factories and required entrepreneurs to have adequate financial resources to purchase factory equipment before establishing a business.

The importance of the invention of the sewing machine is indisputable. However, other technological innovations should not be overlooked. Through the mid to late nineteenth century a number of significant inventions led to the mechanization of the industry. In the 1820s the introduction of the inch tape measure allowed the development of direct measure and proportional systems of cutting. Establishment of standardized sizing was critical to mass production. The American Civil War marked the first step towards reliable sizing as research using soldiers led to the development of the first standardized table of measurements through comparison of body measurements of thousands of men. Because the government issued contracts for soldiers' uniforms, they compiled numerous charts of men's body measurements. These were compared to determine a standard body shape and range of sizes. Sizing and cutting systems continued to be refined in the late nineteenth century.

Electricity further revolutionized production methods. In 1872 the first power cutting machine, a fixed machine which allowed eighteen or more layers of fabric to be cut at once, was introduced.[10] In the 1890s the small, portable rotary and reciprocating knife was invented. With this portable knife the cutter could now work five to ten times faster because of both portability and the increase in the numbers of layers that could be cut at once.[11] These changes affected each segment of the

industry differently, depending upon the type of garment being produced. For example, the impact of cutting machines in the manufacture of overalls was more significant than upon the manufacture of dresses because smaller numbers of dresses were cut at once due to stylistic variations and sizing (in comparison with overalls which were mass produced in a standardized style and fabric and limited size range).

In addition to speeding up the process, mechanization also led to increased sexual delineation of labour. For example, with the invention of the cutting knife, which required more strength than shears, men replaced women as cutters. Cutting became a highly skilled trade.[12] Similarly, improvements in pressing maintained sexual distinctions. Traditional methods of pressing remained virtually unchanged until the twentieth century when gas and electric irons started to replace the stove-heated tailors' goose. The use of gas and electricity gave a more constant and even source of heat but irons continued to be heavy and awkward to use; therefore, pressing remained a male-dominated trade. Division of labour by gender was evident in many aspects of garment manufacturing. Men were generally the managers, salesmen, stock boys, cutters, machinists, pressers and operators of some specialized machinery. Men held many of the skilled labour positions. Women, on the other hand, held the unskilled labour positions. They were seamstresses, operators and clerks. These distinctions were often created or reinforced by ethnicity and technology and were more pronounced in large firms.

Concurrent with improvements in the production of clothing was the industrialization of the manufacture of textiles. The nineteenth century saw widespread introduction of power looms, the cotton gin, and the

invention of the automatic-filled bobbin changer. After the Civil War, Americans began to process their own cotton and domestic wool in greater quantities. The establishment of a domestic textile industry led to greater selection and availability of fabrics for apparel manufacturers.

It has been argued that, in the United States, immigration was the single most important factor influencing the development of the ready-made clothing industry after 1880. According to Rosara Passero, in her study of "Ethnicity in the men's ready-made clothing industry, 1880-1950: the Italian Experience in Philadelphia":

> Changes in organization of the industry and in the methods of production which occurred in the clothing industry were directly related to the influence of immigrant groups who arrived in this country after 1880.[13]

These changes included establishment of the contract shop, which altered the structure of the industry and led to decentralized production in many small shops, and introduction of the task system, which utilized machinery and a division of labour to increase production and lower the per-unit cost of manufacturing a garment. Workers were organized into teams; for example, in the manufacture of coats, an operator, a baster and a finisher worked together. Three teams kept two pressers busy. Each team made eight or nine coats a day. As the teams became more efficient employers increased the amount of work required to maintain wages.[14] The results of these innovations were the elimination of the need for handicraft skills and the subsequent introduction of sweat shops, long hours, bad working conditions and low wages. Passero marks 1880 as the turning point because most of the major technological innovations had been made by this time and because of the shift in immigration from England, Ireland and Germany to eastern and southern Europe.[15] Joel Seidman also observes, in The Needle Trades, that

immigrants were the most significant factor in all but a

> small minority of highly skilled callings in the needle trades where native stock of the older immigrant groups long predominated. Nor did it operate in trades, such as work clothing, which are widely scattered through the South and West, and which drew their working force from small town residents, mostly of older stock.[16]

In the cotton garment industry the proportion of foreign-born workers is much lower than in any other branch of the needle trades. This observation is supported by a review of the membership of the United Garment Workers Union, the union to which Great Western Garment workers belonged:

> The United Garment Workers, the union with the largest membership in the work clothing industry, has a higher percentage of workers of old American stock than has any other union in the needle trade.[17]

Similarly, in his study of the dress industry, Tuchscherer states that no one nationality can be associated with the industry; one group bumped another from pre-eminence as each wave of immigrants arrived; moreover most European dressmaking skills were not utilized in the dressmaking industry.[18]

There are a number of parallels between the growth of the ready-made clothing industry in the United States and the development of the industry in Canada at the turn of the century. Alberta's economic development in relation to the Eastern provinces compares to that of the South-western states in relation to the Eastern states. Dorothy Demoss' description of the early economy of Texas in her PhD dissertation, "The history of apparel manufacturing in Texas, 1897 - 1981," could well have been of Alberta:

> the economy was a self-contained and self-sufficient one, emphasizing the growing of agricultural products for the local market. There were few banks and credit was difficult to secure. The money supply was often limited, and settlers sometimes paid

> for merchandise in corn, eggs, or chickens. Markets were difficult to reach because of the abysmally poor roads, making transportation costs exorbitantly high. The few existing manufacturing plants, such as flour mills or broom factories, produced only for local consumption.[19]

The initial development of companies in both Texas and Alberta was primarily as small, family-owned entrepreneurships serving local markets. Few of the manufacturers had any previous manufacturing experience but had served primarily as retailers, wholesalers, jobbers and salesmen. Both Texas and Alberta focused on the production of garments for local markets;

> Desiring to produce quality products which would satisfy the particular tastes and seasonal needs of the Southwest, the Texas entrepreneurs believed that they could provide consumers with garments priced competitively with those sold by eastern producers.[20]

Production in Alberta, though, focused on workwear: overalls, knitted cardigans and socks for labourers and farmers; serviceable dresses for women; and uniforms for the service industry, and soldiers during times of war. In addition, most garments produced in Alberta were destined for use in the West, primarily because Alberta's entrepreneurs were attempting to minimize competition with established Eastern firms.[21] Finally, public debate concerning labour legislation was comparable. As will be shown in the case of Alberta, a primary objection to the establishment of the forty-eight hour week in the 1920s was the handicap that would result in terms of competition with the East. Similarly, in 1942 Texas manufacturers attempted

> To persuade the panel [on the establishment of a minimum wage] that because the Texas ladies apparel industry was a fledgling industry it should not be equated with the more productive New York City or West Coast apparel centers in determining minimum wage rates.[22]

In light of the similarities between the early growth of the

industries in the Northwest and the Southwest, of the close relationship between manufacturing in Canada and the United States (illustrated by the fact that the workers of Great Western Garment, the only unionized shop in Alberta, were a part of an American union), and considering the lack of published material about the development of the industry specifically in Canada, a review of the history of apparel manufacturing in North America as a whole is useful.

It is important to note that in considering apparel manufacturing in Alberta a number of distinct industries (men's clothing, workclothing, knitting, ladieswear and tailoring) are being lumped together. In reality, each aspect of apparel manufacturing was distinct from the next in terms of methods of production, organization and sexual delineation of labour. Certainly, the impact of ethnicity upon the industry in Alberta between 1911 and 1939 appears to have been minimal. There was not a preponderance of any particular ethnic group involved in manufacturing. The employers were predominantly, but not exclusively, of British origin; the employees were a mixture of British, Scandinavian, Eastern and Southern Europeans and Asians. Although some employee lists do exist and some retired employees are able to provide general observations about ethnicity, the data is too sketchy to allow conclusive statements beyond the fact that ethnicity was not considered to be important by those working in Alberta in the period. Although some informants maintained that there were a number of Ukrainians working at G.W.G., they did not think their ethnicity was significant regarding their work; nor do employee lists suggest that Ukrainians were in the majority.

In addition to the absence of an identifiable ethnic group involved

in apparel manufacturing, another reason for the lack of impact of ethnicity may be the time lag between establishment of the industry in Alberta and in the Eastern centres. The major changes introduced by various ethnic groups in the United States such as cultural prejudices against machine operating or against women working outside the home, (with the result that homework was encouraged as an alternative), and varying acceptance of division of labour, had occurred before the industry was established in Alberta.

A variety of different types of factories, or shops, evolved in the United States. They ranged from "vertical combines," which were the most centralized, to "contract manufacturers," which were the most decentralized. In a "vertical combine" the firm controls all operations in the production of clothing from weaving of fabrics to sales distribution in chain stores owned by the manufacturer. A "manufacturer distributor" is a wholesale manufacturer who distributes clothing for sale in his own retail outlets. An "inside manufacturer" designs, cuts and fabricates in the factory; then the completed garments are sold to retailers. A "jobber" is a middleman who buys wholesale from the manufacturers and sells to retail stores; in men's wear they are not involved in manufacturing at all. A "contract manufacturer" takes the designed and cut garments to contract shops to be assembled. An "inside contractor," on the other hand, works exclusively for one manufacturer. He may be located in the same factory or in a separate building. The manufacturer may or may not supply the machinery but the contractor pays the workers' wages and expenses of the shop. "Outside contractors" bid for the right to manufacture the garments cut by the manufacturer. "Sub-contractors" specialize in particular aspects of the work such as

buttonholes or pressing. Finally, "homeworkers" are individuals who construct or finish garments in their home on a piece-work basis, usually hired by a contract manufacturer or outside contractor.[23]

Inside manufacturers and contract manufacturers predominated in Alberta. The only companies that resembled vertical combines were Tip Top Tailors, which did manufacture its own cloth and sell through its own retail outlets but was based in the East; and Great Western Garment, which did have some of its fabric produced by a subsidiary, The Canadian Cotton Company, in Montreal. It did not, however, have retail outlets. Emery manufacturing began as a company that did not manufacture its own cloth but did have its own retail store.

On the other end of the scale, there was little homework, or outwork, done in Alberta. In The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada, by Laura C. Johnson with Robert E. Johnson, the authors focus on the current situation in terms of homework in Eastern Canada but also provide an introduction to the historical background for homework as it evolved from British cottage industry. They also discussed the development of Toronto sweat shops which were described in the 1896 "Report on the Sweating System in Canada" and leave the reader with haunting images of

> A woman with a large family, some of whom were sick, [who] was the next person we visited ... the clothes at which she had been working were lying with a heap of rubbish on the dirty floor. She could hardly speak with a consumptive cough, which is fast taking her life away ... A little girl, sixteen years of age, who was thin and sickly in appearance, stood by her side and related how she had worked for eight years past ... most of the time at two dollars per week. She now intended to help her mother at the machine.[24]

The word sweatshop originated in England in the nineteenth century. The worst sweatshop conditions in the United States were in major

manufacturing centres in the 1880s and 1890s: where there was overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and fifteen to sixteen hour days. What little Canadian historiography exists dealing with garment manufacturing or related industries focuses upon large Eastern concerns with sweatshop conditions. Similar descriptions can not be found in Alberta for a number of reasons including: the general decline of homework between 1900 and 1920, the emphasis on inside shops, labour legislation, the lack of an identifiable ethnic group to exploit, strikes in other parts of the industry and unionization.

The association between the size of the firm and the grade of work was important in the early twentieth century when improved technology was usually found in larger firms while smaller firms used less skilled labour. Passero has divided firms into small (one to fifty workers), medium (fifty to two hundred and fifty workers) and large (two hundred and fifty to one thousand workers or more).[25] Small firms were most flexible in their reaction to economic fluctuations. They usually paid low rent, had low overhead, used cheap labour and were able to avoid unionization although only seven workers were required to form a chapter of the United Garment Workers of America. In medium sized firms overhead costs formed a higher percentage of production costs. Large firms were able to order in quantity, buy on better terms, receive prompt delivery and were able to operate on a full-time basis (rather than experiencing seasonal layoffs like the smaller firms) to reduce the per unit cost of their product. Large firms, however, were more subject to strict enforcement of labour codes simply due to their visibility. The public was more aware of the existence of large firms and employees found strength in numbers. Tuchscherer notes that the trend in men's

trade was toward larger machine oriented plants whereas the women's division took the opposite track.[26] Great Western Garment formed the only large plant in the province with over three hundred employees in the 1920s. Emery Manufacturing was a medium sized firm with approximately 100 workers. The majority of firms were small, with staffs of ten to fifty.

The major developments in production methods in the garment manufacturing industry took place in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. The characteristics of the industry were largely defined in the East. When garment manufacturing began in Alberta with the founding of Great Western Garment preconceived notions of sweatshops, exploitation of ethnic minorities and of women, and labour disputes had already been established in the public's mind. However, the industry did not develop entirely as expected. Records of exploitation and abuse have not predominated. The parallels with American and Eastern Canadian firms lie in their markets, merchandizing, characteristics of the manufacturers and threats of competition rather than in working conditions.

Footnotes

[1] Rosara Lucy Passero. "Ethnicity in the men's ready-made clothing industry, 1880-1950: The Italian experience in Philadelphia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1978), p.8.

[2] Women were inclined to spend clothing dollars on the purchase of ready-made menswear which much more difficult to construct than ladieswear. Claudia Kidwell, Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1979), p.135.

[3] Jessica Daves, Ready-made miracle: the American Story of Fashion for the Millions. (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1967), p.35.

[4] Kidwell, p.165.

[5] Passero, p.47.

[6] T. Tuchscherer, "Fashion and the Development of the Dress Industry, 1890-1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1973), p.15.

[7] Grace Rogers Cooper, The Invention of the Sewing Machine. (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1968), p.58.

[8] Ibid., p.59.

[9] Ibid., p.48.

[10] Joel Seidman, The Needle Trades. (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1942, 1970), p.16.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. p.33.

[13] Passero, p.47.

[14] Harry A. Corbin, The Men's Clothing Industry: Colonial Through Modern Times. (New York: Fairchild Publications Ltd., 1970), p.72.

[15] Passero notes that the accuracy of this interpretation varies from one centre to another, p.48.

[16] Seidman, p.30.

[17] Ibid. p.46.

[18] Tuchscherer, p.64.

[19] Dorothy D. Demoss, "The history of apparel manufacturing in Texas" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Christian University, 1981. p.6. [20] Ibid., p.13.

[21] Ibid., p.2.

[22] Ibid., p.21.

[23] Passero, p.109.

[24] Laura C. Johnson with Robert E. Johnson, The Seam Allowance Industrial Home—Sewing in Canada, (Toronto; Women's Educational Press, 1982).

[25] Passero, p.116.

[26] Tuchscherer, p.24.

CHAPTER 3

The Alberta Perspective:
Laying the Foundation for Industrial Growth, 1906-1929.

While the ready-made apparel industries reached their maturity in the United States and Eastern Canada by the 1920s, in Alberta they were just getting established. The 1910s were important years for garment manufacturing in Alberta because so many companies began during this time. Many of them only remained in business for a few years but the firms that survived formed the basis of the garment manufacturing industry.

Winnipeg was recognized as the regional metropolis for Western Canada because of the railway, grain trade, wholesale trade, and a wide range of manufacturing and financial activities. This position began to decline in the 1920s when Winnipeg lost its freight rate preferences and Vancouver and Central Canada experienced a sharp increase in industrial activity. However, Winnipeg retained its position as the yardstick against which Alberta garment manufacturers measured their success. The primary competitors for Albertan companies were based in Winnipeg rather than in Montreal or Toronto; Winnipeg's companies also produced workwear and distributed throughout the prairie provinces.

A number of Albertan companies were in their infancy at the time. Although there were numerous independent dressmakers, tailors and milliners during the 1910s there were few companies that could be considered manufacturers. By 1920 the balance shifted somewhat as the number of manufacturers listed in the Henderson's directories increased and the number of independent businessmen and women decreased.

Although there was little apparent activity in manufacturing in the 1910s confidence in future expansion of industry was evident. This confidence was a reflection of the mood of Edmonton - 1911 was a boom year. Real estate values were high; many new shops, businesses and houses were built. New industries such as meat packing and brewing were attracted by the potential for growth in the new provincial capital. Local businessmen boosted the image of Edmonton to encourage the establishment of more new industry. Edmontonians joined other western boosters in travelling throughout Canada and the United States to bring entrepreneurs to their city. The population of Edmonton - Strathcona grew from 31,064 in 1911 to 67,243 in 1913.

Clothing manufacturing was one part of this expansion. Advertising and newspaper feature stories about local industry encouraged the purchase of Edmonton-made goods. The Board of Trade promoted local manufacturers in 1911 when, in a "buy-at-home" campaign, it distributed a letter to four thousand city residents which notified

> the recipient that among other articles which are produced in Edmonton, and which can not be exceeded by similar products from other quarters are cigars, confectionery, harnesses, aerated waters, beer, brooms and brushes, meats and packing products, oatmeal and other cereals in various forms, lumber, mattresses, tents, awnings, clothing, planning mill products and printed supplies.[1]

Shopkeepers featured locally made products in their window displays and the young city offered incentives to manufacturers considering establishing firms in Edmonton. For example, the Evening Journal noted the case of Adrian Cockwell, maker of children's and ladies' garments in Kamouraska County, Quebec, who wrote to Edmonton's Mayor Armstrong requesting concessions. He proposed building a plant worth two hundred

thousand dollars that would employ one hundred and fifty workers at the outset.[2] The offer does not appear to have been accepted by the city although other companies were given incentives. This program was halted without debate by the provincial government in 1914.

A number of companies such as LaFleche Bros., Great Western Garment, Emery Manufacturing, James B. McCormack, Kays Overall Manufacturers, Courtney and Northwestern Manufacturing made tentative beginnings between 1906 and 1916. The district around Jasper and Namayo Avenue (the latter's name changed to 97th Street in 1914 as a result of the amalgamation with Strathcona in 1912) and along Namayo to Griesbach (105 Avenue) was the garment manufacturing centre. In addition independent dressmakers, milliners, tailors, shoemakers, furriers, tent makers and others working in related businesses such as dry cleaning and retail clothing, located their businesses in this district. In fact, informants describe how workers would often float between businesses in the early years, making overalls one week and tents the next, depending upon where there were employment opportunities.[3]

The first manufacturing company of any size to be established in Edmonton was LaFleche Bros. The firm was founded by Joseph A. and Treffle J. LaFleche of Montreal in 1906. They moved to Strathcona after a brief sojourn in the United States and intended to homestead but having arrived in the fall, they were too late to move to the country. They decided to practice their trade, tailoring, over the winter but soon realized that there was a need in Strathcona for "high class tailors." Following the amalgamation they relocated to Jasper Avenue. J. A. LaFleche was an ambitious entrepreneur with a variety of business

Fig. 1. LaFleche Bros., exterior, Edmonton, 1916, Glenbow Archives NC-6-1771.

Fig. 2 LaFleche Bros., store interior, Edmonton, 1920, Glenbow Archives NC-6-4908

Fig. 3 LaFleche Bros., store interior, Edmonton, 1920, Glenbow NC-6-4909

interests. The company produced a range of tailored garments including uniforms, particularly officers' uniforms during World War I.[4]

In 1916 the LaFleche brothers incorporated under the North-West Territories Act and issued public shares as a British Columbia company with the head office in Victoria. Although LaFleche had a British Columbia address its main business was always carried on in Edmonton. J. A. LaFleche's sons, Louis F., Edward C. and Joe, were also involved in the company by 1927. Joe trained in design and tailoring in New York City and became Director in charge of Production and Tailoring; Edward was in sales and L.F. was a manager. In 1929 the head office moved officially to Edmonton. In the early years the company described itself as "high class tailors," then "importing tailors" and finally, "the specialized tailoring organization."

By the mid-1920s growth in the business necessitated acquiring greater capital facilities. In 1926 capital stock increased from $20,000 to $100,000. The Company had business interests throughout Western and Central Canada. By 1929 Louis F. LaFleche was operating out of Vancouver, Treffle J. LaFleche was in Montreal and there was also a Calgary office.[5] Although there were offices outside Edmonton, all production was centred here. The LaFleches moved between Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver and Montreal. The LaFleche Bros. had a staff of approximately 40 in the 1920s and, in addition to private orders, manufactured uniforms for the City of Edmonton - particularly the street railway and fire department. City contracts ensured some security and minimized slowdowns and layoffs.[6]

Great Western Garment, which became Alberta's largest clothing

manufacturer was established in 1911; its development will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

In January 1913, Ramsey's, a prominent downtown department store, announced that it had purchased a piece of property on Griesbach near Namayo

> on which to build a large warehouse and factory, where the firm will manufacture its own ladies' wear, thus giving employment to hundreds of hands.[7]

They planned to break ground in the spring and hoped to have the factory in operation by the fall. The building was to be 77 feet by 122 feet, 4 storeys high and cost $50,000 to construct. However, by the summer they had scaled down their plans somewhat. They formed an arrangement with the Emery Manufacturing Company, built a factory less than half the size, and hired fewer workers. The Edmonton Journal reported in July 1913 that:

> The manufacture of ladies' waists, dresses, and skirts and other similar garments, a large portion of which will be supplied to James Ramsey & Company of this city, was commenced yesterday in the works of Emery Manufacturing Company, which company transferred its plant from Guelph, Ontario to this city. The new factory, which is a building two storeys in height, with ground floor dimensions of 45 feet by 112 feet, is located at the corner of Griesbach Street and Namayo Avenue and has been fitted up with the latest machinery, including forty-nine sewing machines. It is expected that from seventy to eighty girls will be employed in the building.[8]

Daily advertisements of James Ramsey & Company in the Edmonton Journal between the summer of 1913 and the spring of 1914 attest to the continued relationship with Emery Manufacturing and provide some insight into the range of products and the tentative nature of the operation in the early months. Emery Manufacturing produced a variety of mid-priced dresses in silk messaline, wool serge and panama in the five to nine

dollar range; cotton house dresses from eighty-five cents; serges and panama from three dollars and fifty cents; cotton, Bedford cord, pique, linen and English print waists from ninety-five cents; silk waists from two dollars and ninety-five cents; and overall aprons for seventy-five cents.[9] To keep these figures in perspective a seamstress probably earned less than six dollars per week.[10] Ramsey sold dresses for up to forty dollars; the Edmonton-made dresses and waists were serviceable, everyday garments, although often copies of New York designs. Ramsey acknowledged the seasonal nature of the industry by advertising that garments could be offered at discount prices because they were made over the winter in order to keep the factory operating during the slow period. In January 1914, the company announced that,

> We Have Determined to Manufacture in Our Edmonton Factory The Best Dresses That it is Possible to Obtain in Canada at $ 5.00.
>
> There are two reasons why these $5.00 dresses must be far superior to the ordinary dresses at the same price. First, we manufacture them for our own trade, and we certainly must make the standard of Ramsey-made garments very high. Secondly, they are Edmonton made goods and, especially now, at the beginning of the garment manufacturing period in Edmonton, it is up to us to prove to you that Edmonton can produce just as good garments and better values than those imported from the East. The character, the style, the fit and the values of these dresses are such that we are proud of their having been made in our own city and especially proud of their having been made by Ramsey's.[11]

The relationship between Ramsey's and Emery appears to have ended in the spring of 1914 as there were no further Ramsey advertisements specifying Edmonton-made goods after April of that year. The present day Emery Company Limited traces its beginnings to two brothers from Winnipeg who are said to have established the company in June 1914; officials were unaware of the previous association with Ramsey's.

Fig. 4 Emery Manufacturing Co., exterior 1914, Glenbow Archives NC-6-1771

Fig. 5 Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1913, Glenbow Archives NA-1328-64730

Fig. 6 Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1913, Glenbow Archives NA-1328-64729

Interestingly, although the Journal indicated that the Emery's came from Guelph, Ontario and company records indicate that they came from Winnipeg, neither the Ontario nor Manitoba governments have any record of Emery.[12] The stock of Ramsey's changed during 1914 as they advertised more manufacturers' surpluses and bankruptcy sales stock; Mr. Ramsey's energies were further diverted when he became mayor of Edmonton in September.

Emery Manufacturing continued to grow and diversify. In November 1914, the Edmonton Journal featured a "Home Industry Section" promoting "Edmonton Made Goods." In discussing clothing manufacturers the paper reported that "the most pretentious establishment of this kind is the Emery Manufacturing Company ... it has become one of the most important of Edmonton manufacturing industries."[13] In an advertisement on the same page, the company introduced itself:

Let Us Tell You Who We Are -

> The work that we do is the making of women's fashionable dresses for social occasions; the various kinds of dresses for street wear and plain utility dresses for house use, also plain tailored and fancy waists, separate skirts, women's neckwear and dresses for juniors and children's wear. We have the proud distinction of owning and operating one of the best equipped manufacturing plants of its kind in Western Canada, employing from fifty to seventy-five happy, cheerful artists and seamstresses whose sole ambition is to excel in producing garments that are distinctive, artistic and serviceable.

The advertisement is accompanied by two photographs of the interior of the company showing the cutting room and power machines. Obviously the firm was sensitive to the prevalent image of garment manufacturing companies as sweat shops and was anxious to dispel this picture because the advertisement emphasized that the staff was happy and the

photographs show a well-lit, orderly, modern factory.[14]

The Emery Manufacturing Company continued production of ladieswear in the 1920s although it was listed variously as "Ladies Ready-to-Wear," "Clothing-Wholesale," and "Clothing-Manufacturers." The firm remained at 9636 Jasper Avenue throughout the 1920s but moved a few times in the early 1930s.[15] A complete inventory of the firm's assets, undertaken in December 1928 by the Canadian General Appraisal Company, provides some insight into the nature of the operation. The company owned over sixty sewing machines, a number of which were specialty machines for operations such as over-edging, hemstitching and button sewing. One machine of particular interest is a bias tape cutting machine invented by Emery Manufacturing of Winnipeg. In listing the assets of the company the appraisal included details such as partitions, toilet stalls, lighting and signage. Exterior wall signs included "The Emery Co. Limited, Women's and Misses Garments" and "Emery Quality Garments of Satisfaction." The items listed in the basement suggest that the staff lunchroom was there (ie. "12 Doz. hotel ware cups") and that the machinists worked there (ie. "3 1/2" Stationary base machinists vise"). The first floor contained the shipping department ("30" Roll paper cutter"), retail sales and showroom, the pattern room ("5 Costume dress forms, nickel plated tripod base"), a shop for additional machinist activities (various machinists' and carpenters' tools), and washrooms. The manager's office was on the second floor, as was the stock room, the cutting room and a sewing machine room. Photographs were included as visual documentation including two of the first floor, one showing the pattern room with dress forms, sample garments and the bias cutting

machine (Figure 7); the other showing the operators' machines (Figure 8). The photograph of the cutting room on the second floor shows work in progress as layers of fabric had been laid out and the templates placed upon them (Figure 9). Unfortunately no workers were included in these photographs but the photographs and documentation combine to illustrate a factory that was well established - to use their term a "going concern."[16]

The city's incentatives program raised the interest of another manufacturer in 1914 when George O. Sanburn of Seattle announced that he was establishing a sweater factory in Edmonton. Mr. Sanburn was a sophisticated entrepreneur, as the Edmonton Journal reported;

> Mr. Sanburn possesses some very valuable patents. So valuable are they that a firm in Michigan has obtained the sole right to manufacture for that state, and Mr. Sanburn has such a well-known firm as A.G. Sparing negotiating with him for the rights in the entire United States.[17]

The July announcement indicated that Sanburn had already ordered his machinery and begun to receive orders for sweaters to be delivered in September. However, his firm was never listed in the Henderson's directory, was not mentioned again in the Edmonton Journal, and does not appear to have been established. Perhaps the war interfered.[18] Another factor may have been the provincial government's decision to end the incentives program in 1914. The establishment of Sanburn's company was being arranged by Commissioner Hall; perhaps he was unable to meet his end of the agreement but there is no documentation to explain why the company was not established.

A few short lived companies appeared after 1911 including James B. McCormack, hosiery manufacturer (1912 - 1913) and Kays Overall Manu-

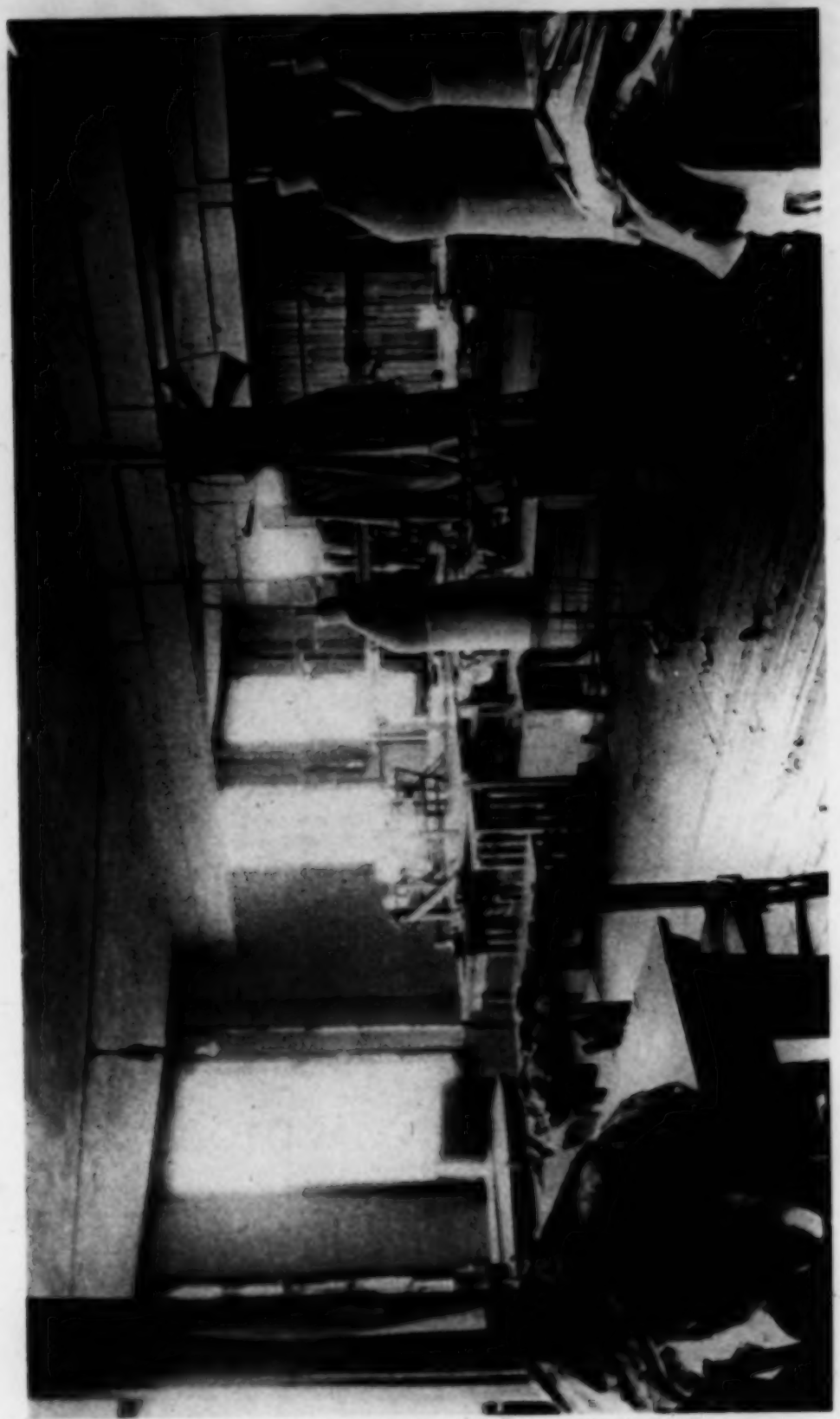

Fig. 7 Emery Manufacturing Co., workroom, 1928, P.A.A. A16143
Courtesy Dan Starko

Fig. 8 Emery Manufacturing Co., machine room, 1928, P.A.A. A16141
Courtesy Dan Starko

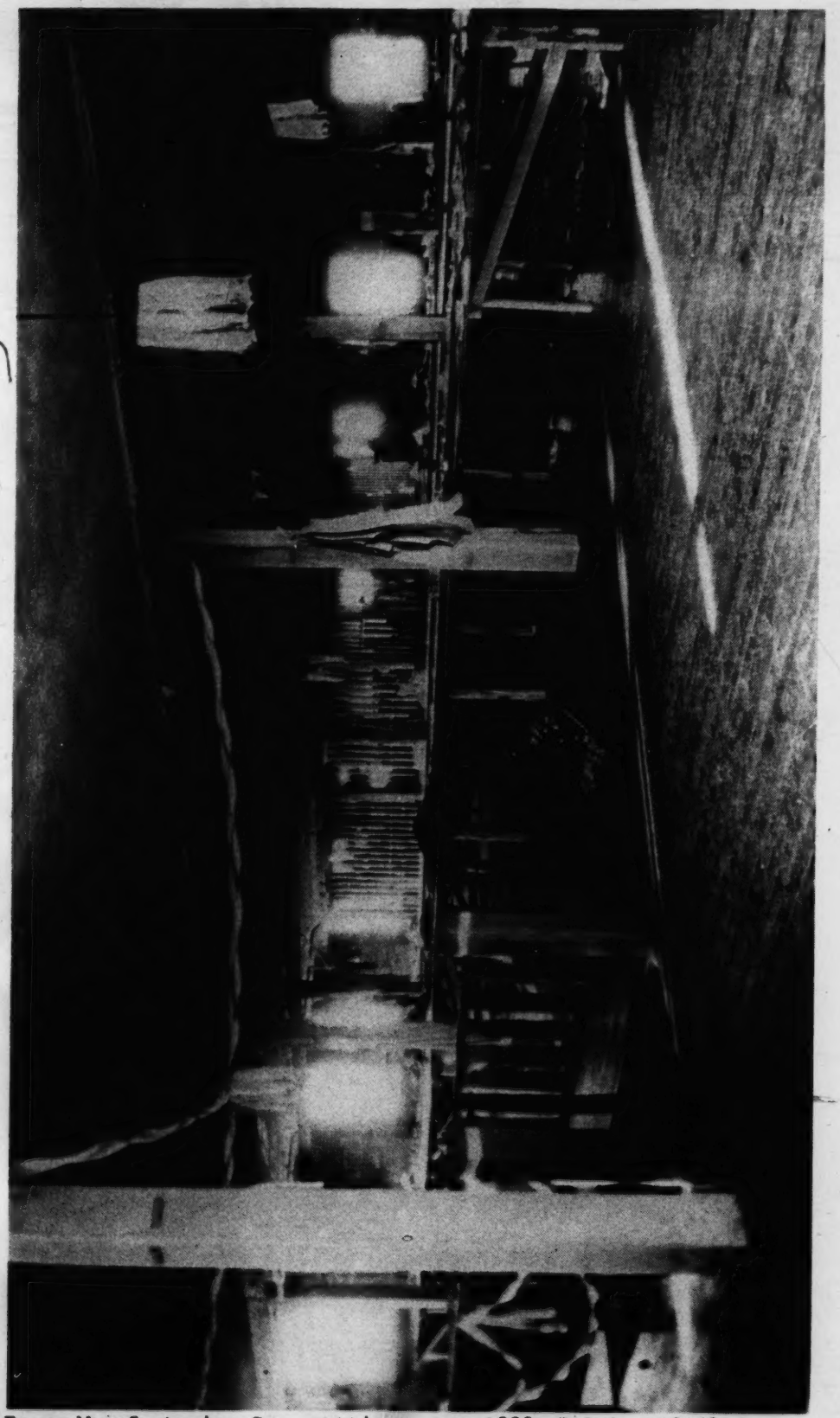

Fig. 9 Emery Manufacturing Co., cutting room, 1928, P.A.A. A16142
Courtesy Dan Starko

facturers (1914-1919). Kays existed for several years as manufacturers of various types of garments and was a branch of a firm established in London, England. Two firms that operated for twenty years also opened during this time: Courtney Manufacturing was established in 1916 at 9452 Jasper Avenue as an overall manufacturing company; and Northwestern Manufacturing, also overall and pant manufacturers.

Courtney Manufacturing was listed in the Henderson's directory as a "Shirt, Blouse and Overall" manufacturer at 10349 97 Street from 1920-1921, then from 1922 it was listed at 9609 103 A Avenue. From 1924-1932 the company was listed under "Clothing-Wholesale" at 10607 97 Street.[19] Beyond that, little has been determined about the nature of the firm. It was owned by an Englishman, who sold his machinery to General Whitewear when he went out of business, perhaps as a consequence of the Depression. It was a very small company and the machine operators worked on a piece-work basis as was typical throughout the industry. Roberta Watson, whose family later owned General Whitewear, worked for Mr. Courtney for a short time in the early 1930s but does not remember much about the operation.[20]

North Western Manufacturing also became established and continued production throughout this period. Henderson's directory locates the firm at 10261 108 Street from 1922-1929 and lists it as a "Shirt, Blouse and Overall" manufacturer. From 1930-1932 it was listed under "Clothing-Wholesale" at 10185 107 Street.[21] Northwestern was not a very large firm when compared to Great Western Garment but employed over seventy-five people who made primarily pants and overalls. It paid on the same scale as Great Western Garment although it was not unionized.

Because of the mobility of machine operators moving from one firm to another working conditions and salaries were comparable.[22]

These companies were no doubt inspired by the success of the Great Western Garment Company which had been established in 1911 by Charles Archibald Graham, Alexander Cameron Rutherford and Alfred Edmund Jackson. Jackson, the company president, was a member of city council and co-owner of the Alberta Hotel. Rutherford, vice-president, was a solicitor and former Premier; and Graham, secretary-treasurer, had been a buyer and salesman with the Revillon Dry Goods firm. The company was incorporated January 30, 1911 as manufacturers of high-grade overalls, shirts and pants for men and boys. In March the Evening Journal noted the building of a new plant on Namayo Avenue: "the fact that this is the first factory of its kind to be erected in Edmonton makes the enterprise more interesting and worthy."[23] The company logo, the initials G.W.G. with the W growing into a pair of wings, was registered in Ottawa in April of the first year of operation.[24] By the end of 1911 the number of factory workers had increased to over one hundred and the sales staff numbered twelve.[25]

World War I encouraged further growth of Great Western Garment as war contracts provided full-time, continuous employment and acted as a buffer for the seasonal purchases (and therefore production) of work clothes. The company produced clothing for both the Canadian and British armies. In February 1915, when it was completing a contract for 3,000 shirts for the Canadian government, the firm received a $70,000 contract to produce 20,000 pairs of pants for the British army. This contract allowed the plant to run at full capacity, employing one

hundred and fifty fulltime workers for two to three months and there was an indication of more work to follow.[26] In fact, when Lillian Morris first started to work for Great Western Garment in 1916, the employees were working ten hour days with a half day on Saturdays. Daily hours were not reduced to eight until 1918. Married women were allowed to apply for jobs for the first time and their work was considered to be of such importance that seamstresses for Great Western Garment were classified as performing an essential war service and, as such, they were not allowed to quit work during this period unless they enlisted.[27]

An article in the Edmonton Journal in 1914 described the factory as a two storey building at 528 Namayo, 100 feet by 166 feet which reflected an investment of $150,000. As Great Western Garment grew the company moved first to 10438 Namayo by 1915 and 10305 Namayo in 1917.[28] It had twenty-five electrically operated machines in constant operation and a payroll of approximately $100,000 annually.[29] The company noted that its products - overalls, men's work shirts, mackinaw clothing, men's tweed and corduroy pants - were exported east to Regina and west to Vancouver but complained, in direct terms, about the lack of support for locally made goods in Edmonton:

> This is one more of the local industries which does not receive the support it should from the people of Edmonton, either through the retailer, wholesaler or the buying public...[30]

Great Western Garment would sell either directly to the public or to the retail trade, unlike Emery which sold only to the trade.

Great Western Garment also became more established during the 1920s. Work continued to be seasonal with the 'girls' having as much as three months off in the winter and, "if the farmers didn't get rain in June we

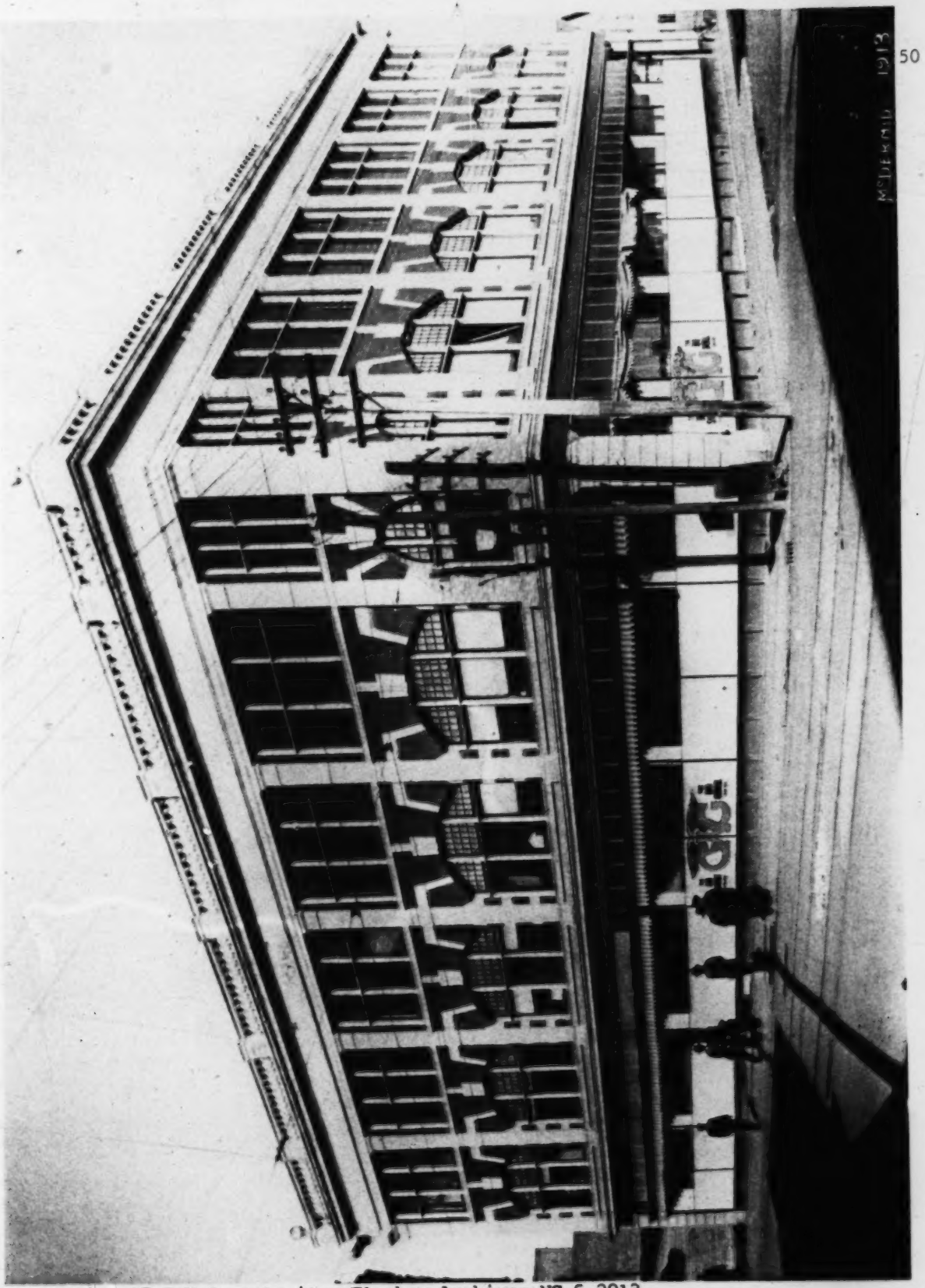

Fig. 10 G.W.G. exterior, Glenbow Archives NC-6-2913

Fig. 11 G.W.G. exterior 1918, Glenbow Archives NC-6-3267

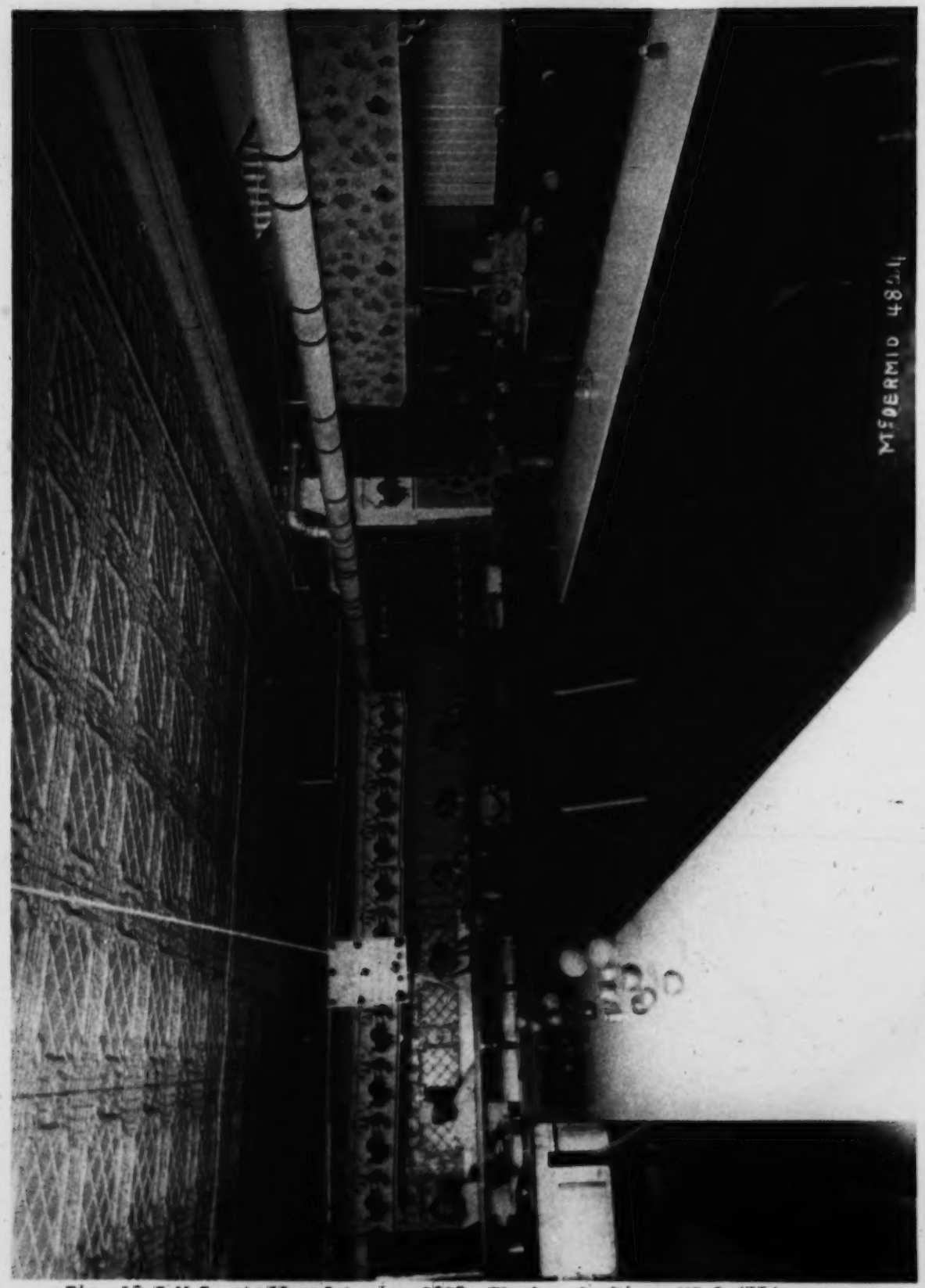

Fig. 12 G.W.G. staff cafeteria, 1919, Glenbow Archives NC-6-4824

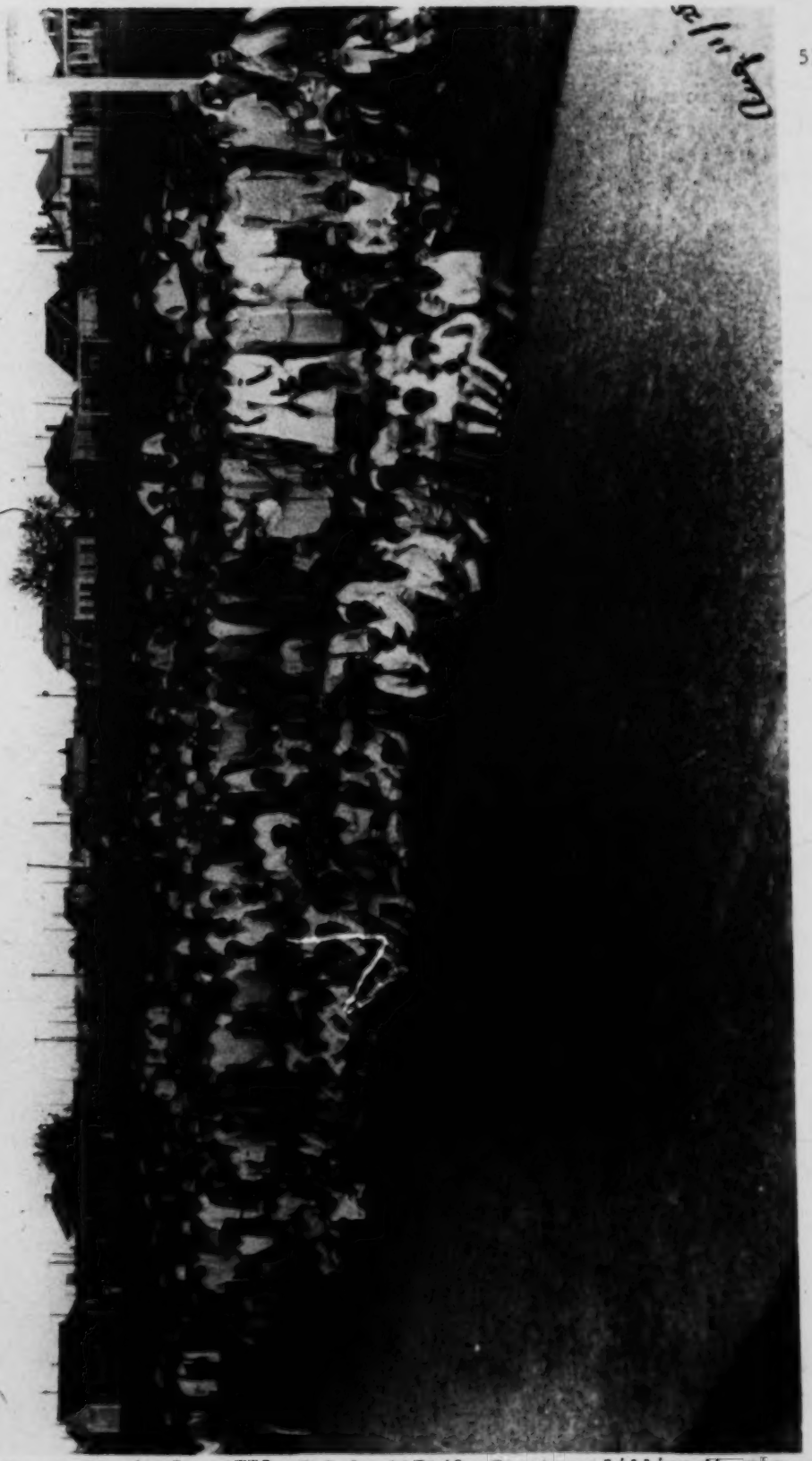

Fig. 13 G.W.G. staff picnic, 1928, P.A.A. A16146, Courtesy Lillian Morris

used to get a couple of/months holiday in the summer."[31] In the mid 1920s the company expanded its line of production into mackinaws in an attempt to make business steadier. The firm itself would run throughout the year but some of the departments would close and staff would be laid off in those areas. In a further attempt to reduce lay-offs the company would switch employees from one department to another; but after the establishment of the Minimum Wage Board this practice posed some problems (discussed below.)

The most dramatic event of the period was a fire at G.W.G. in 1926 which resulted in $250,000 damage to the factory and the 300 employees being laid off for a short period. The first fire alarm went off at 3:00 in the morning, May 10, and firefighters were still struggling to put the fire out when the workers arrived for their shifts. Fortunately a new addition which had been built in 1925, and housed twenty-six machines and a supply of fabric, was not damaged so the company was able to re-open quickly. It was two or three months before it was back to full production.[32]

A number of other firms appeared and disappeared almost as quickly in the 1920s including: Alberta Garment Manufacturers Ltd. at 10656 101 Street in 1929, and the Economy Commercial Co. Ltd. at 10669 97 Street in 1921-22. D'Allaird ladies ready-to-wear included manufacturing in its name in 1920 and continued as a retail outlet after that date. The Grace Lingerie Manufacturing Co. was established briefly at 10713 97 Street in 1921.[33]

The Edmonton Knitting Company was founded by Peter Ganeff in 1919 at 9548 - 9550 101 Avenue.

> The original plant consisted of a small hand knitting machine in one room of a private dwelling and the business was entirely retail. The business has gradually grown and larger premises have been acquired from time to time.[34]

In the summer of 1921 it branched out as a wholesale concern with goods distributed throughout the three Western Provinces. The factory had the capacity to produce twelve dozen sweaters a day and two hundred and fifty pairs of hosiery a month.[35] In 1922 the company went public under the name of the Edmonton Knitting Mills Limited with a partnership including Ganeff, Charles Henry Forster and Arthur Cornelius Huber; they raised $20,500 in order to move to larger premises and acquire additional machinery. The prospectus explaining the rationale for issuing stock indicated that the company's prices and goods were such that "it can compete favorably with any of the leading manufacturers of the Dominion and show substantial profits."[36]

However, the events of the next few years proved that the company was on shaky ground. In 1925, C. H. Forster moved to Vancouver and by 1927 the shareholders decided to wind up the company. The major creditors, Messrs. Slaters Ltd. lost $17,129.57 in claims and $1,338. in dividends. They struggled to sell the assets of the company and recoup some of their investment. All finished goods were sold to the Hudson's Bay Company for $1,564.82. The principals of the Edmonton Knitting Mills contacted other knitting companies to see if they could sell the machinery; they also tried to get other local men to take over the business, then contacted a women's club in hopes that they might resume operations but no one was interested. Eventually a Mr. Madson purchased the business for $450.00. Mr. A. G. Aldridge, secretary of the Edmonton Knitting Mills and liquidator for the firm, wrote:

> Finally the writer feels that he must state emphatically that from experience gained in attempting to organize interests to take over the business and from his investigation of the Company's affairs, etc. he has satisfied himself that with such an antiquated plant, it was impossible for anyone to compete with larger concerns and to make any money.[37]

Of the companies established during the 1920s, the Reynolds Manufacturing Company is the only one still operating. It celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 1988. The Reynolds Manufacturing Company was founded by Harold N. Reynolds in the basement of a house at 9832 - 113 Street in 1928 after he left Great Western Garment where he had been managing chef in the cafeteria. It was incorporated the following year. The company was valued at $1200. Reynolds raised $20,000 during a brief period as a public company in 1929 then reverted to private ownership, in the hands of the Reynolds family. Financial backers and officers were Dr. Herbert Edgar Chatham and Halwarda D. Chatham. The Memorandum of Association outlined a typically vague description of the operation:

> ...The business of manufacturers of clothing, wearing apparel of all kinds, tailors, drapers, hosiers, milliners, costumers, hatters, furriers, glovers, silk, cotton, cloth and lace merchants, haberdashers, portmanteau makers and general outfitters, and dealers in india-rubber and waterproof goods and other articles, commodities or things necessary for the purposes of the Company, with the right to manufacture, import or export and to act as agents or commission agents in all kinds of manufactured articles, goods, wares, merchandise and materials.[38]

Mr. Reynolds manufactured utility garments for waiters and cooks, riding breeches, nurses' uniforms and gym shorts.[39]

Between 1906 and 1929 a number of garment manufacturing firms were established in Edmonton. Some of these remained open only a few years. Except in the case of the Edmonton Knitting Mills there is no documentation to explain why they were so short-lived. This is typical of the industry generally where the average life of a men's clothing

firm is only seven years.[40] Whether due to antiquated machinery, poor management, lack of capital or competition from established firms, garment manufacturing is a difficult industry in which to succeed. The 1910s and 1920s were turbulent times as Edmonton was just becoming established and went through a cycle of good and bad years. G.W.G. was founded during the boom of 1911; by 1914 Edmonton was in a depression. The firms that became well established did so through adapting to contemporary economic conditions by expanding production in one area and cutting back in others, by maintaining a cooperative relationship with their employees, and through favorable legislation developed by government. Cooperation with labour was critical to maintaining consistent levels of production and to firms developing their reputations for quality and reliability. At the same time as individual firms were evolving and maturing, working conditions, wages and the character of the labour force were being defined.

Footnotes

[1] "Still Boosting Edmonton Goods," Evening Journal, June 13, 1911.

[2] "Eastern Manufacturer Offers to Build Plant Worth $ 20,000 in City," Edmonton Journal, September 27, 1911.

[3] Interview with Roberta Watson.

[4] Interview with LeRoy LaFleche.

[5] Corporate Records, LaFleche Bros., Inc., Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[6] Interview with LeRoy LaFleche.

[7] "Ramsey Will Build Factory in East End," Edmonton Journal, January 7, 1913.

[8] Edmonton Journal, July 17, 1913.

[9] Advertisements, Edmonton Journal, January 24, 1914; January 13, 1914.

[10] Interviews with Ivy Grimstead, Max Bedard and Georgina Graff.

[11] Advertisement, James Ramsey & Company, Edmonton Journal, January 26, 1914.

[12] Interview with Dan Starko; company promotional material in Emery Manufacturing Co.'s files.

[13] "Clothing Manufacturers," Edmonton Journal, November 28, 1914.

[14] "The Emery Manufacturing Company," advertisement, Ibid.

[15] Henderson's Edmonton Directories, 1920-30.

[16] Appraisal of the Emery Company Ltd. by Canadian General Appraisal Company, December 12, 1928, courtesy Don Starko.

[17] "Sweater Factory in Edmonton to be Delivering in Fall. Through Industrial Commissioner Hall Another Enterprise is Established," Edmonton Journal, July 11, 1914.

[18] During World War II, the shortage of yarn being imported from Britain was cited as the reason for closing the Calgary Knitting Mills. A similar shortage of supplies may have affected Sanburn. Interview with George Lem, Glenbow Alberta Archives.

[19] Henderson's Edmonton Directories, 1920-32.

[20] Interview with Roberta Watson.

[21] Henderson's Edmonton Directories, 1920-32.

[22] Interview with Elizabeth Shinbine.

[23] "A Big New Factory for Edmonton City Great Western Garment Co. Will Establish Plant on Namayo Avenue," Edmonton Journal, March 10, 1911.

[24] Records of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Canada.

[25] Company records, G.W.G.

[26] "Edmonton Will Make 20,000 Pairs of British Army Trousers on Order From the War Office," Edmonton Journal, February 3, 1913.

[27] Interviews with Anne Ozipko and Lillian Morris.

[28] Company sources indicate that the company moved during 1911 but the Henderson's directory lists G.W.G. at 528 Namayo in 1913 and 1914.

[29] "Great Western Garment," Edmonton Journal, November 28, 1914.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Interview with Max Bedard.

[32] "Factory Prey to Flames: 300 Employees of Great West Garment Co. Out of Work," Edmonton Bulletin, May 10, 1926.

[33] Henderson's Edmonton Directories, 1920-30.

[34] Edmonton Knitting Mills Ltd., Articles of Association, p.3, March 8, 1922, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[35] Ibid.

[36] _____, Prospectus, March 9, 1922. Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[37] Report by A. G. Aldridge prepared for Messrs. Slaters Ltd., April 1927, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[38] Reynolds Manufacturing Company; Memorandum of Association, April 2, 1929, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[39] "Humble beginnings led to 60-year success story," Edmonton Journal, May 10, 1988; P.M.A. Interview with Lloyd Reynolds.

[40] Seidman, p.12.

CHAPTER 4

Labour's Response, 1911-1935

The labour force within garment manufacturing was predominantly female, particularly in some positions such as machine operators. Men worked as managers, salesman, shipping clerks, cutters and machinists; although smaller in number, these were better paying positions. Yet the women did not complain about their situations. The economic times were difficult and they expected to work hard for their wages. Thus Labour's response was generally conservative.

Great Western Garment had unionized in its first year of operation, as much for the benefit of management as for the employees. As a unionized shop the firm could use the union label which attracted sales from other unionized occupations. The fact that G.W.G. was unionized influenced other non unionized firms and established the wage scale and standard of working conditions within the city. In addition, cooperation between management and labour was particularly important in maintaining industrial growth in the early years.

With only seven employees, the minimum required to get a charter, the workers of Great Western Garment formed Local 120 of the United Garment Workers of America (U.G.W.A.) in 1911.[1] The U.G.W.A. had been formed in 1891. It grew out of earlier attempts to found a national (American) union by Jewish workers in New York. Conflict between the national officers, who were old stock Americans, and the dissatisfied membership of recent immigrants resulted in an eventual schism within the organization. The officers followed the general labour policy of the conservative American Federation of Labour but the majority of the membership was radical. The officers wanted to push "union made" labels and to expand membership to workers in overall and shirt trades as well

as in the clothing industry. They felt that there was a greater potential for selling labels to those in the overall and workshirt trades because,

> The purchasers of overalls and work shirts were, most likely, workmen and the union label on these garments was thought to enhance sales appeal.[2]

In 1911 the union split and the radical members joined Sidney Hillman in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (A.C.W.A.). The American Federation of Labour strongly supported the U.G.W.A. but refused to recognize the A.C.W.A.

This background might not appear to be pertinent; however, given the general lack of unionization in garment manufacturing in Alberta one wonders why G.W.G. formed a union so early and with such a small staff. The timing may be significant as the organization of Local 120 corresponds with the split in the U.G.W.A. Great Western Garment employees shared the conservative approach to labour reform and the interest in union labels of their American counterparts in the U.G.W.A. In fact, the Evening Journal reported in August 1911 that:

> During the past twelve months, a new industry, which is operated under the firm name of the Great West Garment Company has sprung up in the city, and gives employment to 100 men and women. Almost immediately after the organization of the company, the employees also organized, and a local of the Garment Workers Union of America was established in the city. The employers were desirous of using the union label on their products, and the employees experienced no difficulty in launching their local union.[3]

An article about Great Western Garment in the "Patronize Home Industry" section of the Journal in 1914 also rejected the sweat shop image in Edmonton's garment manufacturing:

> the company is so absolutely keeping up the quality of its output that they have made it impossible for a sweatshop ever to be established in this line in Edmonton. They pay the union scale of wages and keep expert help in all departments.[4]

G.W.G. remained the only unionized shop in the province but it influenced the hours, wages and working environments of other companies.

The lack of unionization within garment manufacturing generally in Edmonton may be explained by the general ineffectiveness of garment workers' trade unions in this period. In fact, by the end of the Depression the U.G.W.A. was disintegrating. Although Western Canadian labour historians focus upon strikes and labour disputes in the period, garment manufacturing was a relatively stable industry. Traditionally, historians have focussed upon volatile, male-dominated industries.

Documentation concerning number of people working in the industry, wages and hours of work in the period is fragmentary and often contradictory. According to correspondence with members of the Minimum Wage Board there were two hundred and twenty-eight women employed in three garment factories in Edmonton in 1922 (which three were considered is not indicated; probably G.W.G., Emery and a smaller firm). One hundred and thirteen were employed full-time at 44 hours per week; seventy-seven worked 36-40 hours per week; three worked 30-35 hours; thirty-two worked 20-29 hours; two worked 10-19 hours and one worked 5-9 hours.[5] This is the only study from the period that identifies the number of individuals working part time, although retirees suggest that it was common practice. The Commissioner of Labour's Annual Report from 1926 identified 1420 manufacturing firms in Alberta employing 24,861 males over eighteen, 223 under and 388 apprentices. In 1927 it found that there were 6,320 females and 20,807 males employed in 3,371 firms. By 1928 it counted 1528 manufacturing firms employing 33,094 males over 18 and 651 under; 4,236 females over 18 and 232 under; and 575 apprentices. At that time there were 229 males and 809 females employed

in garment manufacturing. Twenty-three firms were registered and full-time employees worked between 44-60 hours per week, thirteen to fifty-two weeks per year.[6]

The following table compares weekly wages of those in garment manufacturing in Alberta to those in other trades within the manufacturing sector for the years 1925-1927. (Table 1) Women working in garment manufacturing were able to earn considerably more than those working in other traditionally female occupations such as the service industry, where the minimum wage was usually the maximum wage they could expect. Wages are difficult to interpret because records are incomplete and Factory Inspectors sometimes had difficulty getting accurate information. In 1935 Miss M. A. Hamilton, Chief Factory Inspector, noted the difficulty Inspectors faced because false information was given to them by employees.[7] As well, factory inspections only occurred once a year and there were not sufficient inspectors to be effective in enforcing legislation. Unfortunately, few reports of Factory Inspectors remain with the Department of Labour's Files and those that do do not refer to garment manufacturing firms.

The figures reveal that the younger employees were paid on the apprenticeship scale, below minimum wage. Rebecca Coulter concludes in her article, "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931," that

> In most cases the term 'apprentice' became simply a synonym for 'learner' and, as some surviving collective agreements show, "learners" were usually people under twenty who were paid lower wages for longer periods of time just because they were young.[9]

Juvenile labour within industry was another important issue, yet figures illustrating the extent of juvenile employment in the province are difficult to interpret. Teen-agers made up 8 percent of the male and

TABLE I

Weekly Wages of Employees in Garment Manufacturing Compared to Those in Other Manufacturing Positions, 1925-1927

	1925		1926		1927	
	GARMENT MANUFACTURING	AVERAGE	GARMENT MANUFACTURING	AVERAGE	GARMENT MANUFACTURING	AVERAGE
Men over 18	$23.39	$27.74	$28.46	$26.95	$30.02	$27.66
Men under 18	8.55	11.44	9.55	11.50	11.00	12.17
Women over 18	15.14	16.10	16.93	16.52	17.15	16.31
Women under 18	9.55	10.62	12.00	10.69	12.00	11.28
Apprentices	7.89	13.89	8.46	12.86	11.37	12.84

Source: The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour, 1926-1928. [8]

26 per cent of the female work force in Edmonton in 1921; by 1931 these figures had dropped to 6 per cent and 20 percent respectively. Of those aged 15-19 years in 1921, 42 per cent were wage earning; 19 percent of those aged 16-17 and 51 percent of those aged 18-19 years.

> In 1921, 606 youths between fifteen and nineteen, 13 per cent of the total, were neither at work nor at school. In 1931 these figures were 1,030 and 12 percent [sic] respectively. Most of these young people were likely unemployed but because they had never worked full-time they were not recorded in wage-earner statistics. As well the increase in school enrollments between 1921 and 1931 is partly a reflection of the tightening job market for teenagers.[10]

The figures for juvenile employment within manufacturing as a whole are interesting. For example, in 1921, the first year for which the Canadian census lists occupations for those under 16, the following table (Table II) shows the number of boys and girls employed. For boys, agriculture was the predominant field of employment, followed by manu-

TABLE II

Comparison of Numbers of Employed Juveniles to Total Number of People Employed Generally and in Manufacturing Specifically, 1921.

	CANADA				ALBERTA			
	POPULATION		EMPLOYED		POPULATION		EMPLOYED	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
10-13	371,519	365,061	7,729	1,092	24,711	23,819	223	16
14-15	89,400	86,827	3,918	5,554	5,157	382	382	39
16-17	82,197	86,680	33,518	10,124	5,190	4,989	374	235
TOTAL	165,252	163,100	112,050	42,295	10,116	9,519	6,185	1,483

of those employed, the numbers in manufacturing were:

	CANADA			ALBERTA		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
10-13	680	462	218	-----	----	-----
14-15	3,728	2,240	1,488	9		
16-17	9,860	5,702	4,158	83		
TOTAL	34,185	19,961	14,224	425		

Source: The Department of Labour. The Employment of Children and Young Person in Canada.[13]

facturing; for girls under 14 the service industry was foremost, again followed by manufacturing. For those over 14 manufacturing was the most common source of employment. The percentage of juveniles employed in factories in Alberta was only 1.8% compared to 48.2% for Ontario and 31.3% for Quebec. Compared to the total number of people employed in

manufacturing in Alberta, boys ages ten to seventeen years accounted for 5.2% and girls 10.6%. Although juveniles were a relatively small proportion of the work force in manufacturing, the 10.6% of girls under 17 in Alberta were largely working in the textile goods and clothing areas.[12]

TABLE III

Comparison of Wages of Juveniles to Those of Workers of All Ages, 1921 and 1931.

June 1, 1920 - June 1, 1921

AGE	TOTAL WAGE EARNERS		AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS		AVERAGE NO. OF WEEKS		AVERAGE EARNINGS PER WEEK	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
10-14	12	5	$368	$190	45.92	43.40	$8.00	$4.38
15-19	1,009	93	665	549	47.67	49.17	27.50	15.65
All Ages	13,050	3,651	1,311	769	47.67	49.17	27.50	15.65

June 1, 1930 - June 1, 1931

AGE	TOTAL WAGE EARNERS		AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS		AVERAGE NO. OF WEEKS		AVERAGE EARNINGS PER WEEK	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
10-15	33	21	$152	$105	43.67	42.76	$3.47	$2.45
16-17	357	313	331	258	39.59	42.54	8.37	6.06
18-19	807	901	491	403	49.48	44.90	12.43	8.98
All Ages	20,735	6,087	1,097	641	40.42	46.69	27.14	13.73

Source: Census of Canada figures compiled by Rebecca Coulter in "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931" [14]

Wages earned by young people during the 1920s can be broken down further and compared to the above Table for the year 1925-1927 by examining the Census of Canada figures from 1920-1921 and 1930-1931.

Juvenile employment should not have been a major concern in Alberta because it had been legislated against from such an early stage. Only juveniles in the 15-17 bracket could work in factories from as early as 1917. The Federal Department of Labour's 1930 report, The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada, concluded that:

> The small commercial and industrial population in Canada as compared with countries with a longer industrial history makes the problem of juvenile employment in commerce and industry in Canada less extensive and less apparent but it also makes possible its regulation at an earlier stage based on the experience of older countries.[15]

The extent of the problem of juvenile employment is evident in concerns about enforcement of provincial regulations. For example, a boy could state his age and if he "had the height" the employer did not question him. Two of the informants interviewed who had worked for G.W.G. started at age 14.[16] An informant from LaFleche Bros. also started underage.

When Mrs. Annie Stephenson and Mrs. Lillian Morris represented Local 120 of the United Garment Workers of America at the Alberta Federation of Labour's twelfth convention in Calgary in 1928 they raised

> The Case of the Maxine School of Beauty Culture in Calgary, where the purpose of the Minimum Wage Act was defeated by girls being employed at wages lower than the act permitted, when the place of business was termed a 'school,' [which] makes clear the need for an amendment to the Act to take care of such cases. Already, we are given to understand, other places of business where girls are employed are contemplating the opening of 'schools' so that they may avoid the payment of wages set out in the Minimum Wage Act.[17]

Was the Great Western Garment Company one of the business referred to as considering the opening of a "school?" Unfortunately, although

G.W.G. did have an instructress on staff whose job it was to train new employees, Lillian Morris no longer has any recollection of these events.[18]

The whole area of payment of apprentices was one which the Minimum Wage Board had difficulty enforcing. The Minimum Wage Act limited the number of apprentices that could be hired; however, companies (including Hatchwear, Caldwell Knitting, Emery Manufacturing, LaFleche Bros. and the Edmonton Knitting Company) occasionally requested permission to hire additional apprentices.[19] Although the Board frequently agreed to such requests, in 1926 permission was refused to the Edmonton Knitting Company. The Board "agreed that this matter [should] lay in abeyance until a full investigation has been made and complete record of the firm's activities during last year be presented to the Board."[20] The results of this investigation were not preserved but the company was in serious difficulty at this time. Perhaps this decision was a factor in its subsequent failure. As late as 1935, Emery Manufacturing suggested to the Minimum Wage Board that:

> It would appear to the writer that there should be such a clause in the Act to cover Improvers. As it now stands, all females employed less than a year are classed as apprentices. This puts a handicap on such an industry as ours, in as much as we are not able to take on as many new girls as we can use.[21]

Because garment manufacturing requires largely unskilled labour they could have used more employees with less than a year's experience than the Act allowed. At times there were not enough girls with more than a year's experience available.

Numerous attempts were made to devise a scheme whereby apprentices would be earning a fair, reasonable living wage and employers would not be paying too much for untrained staff. The question of minimum wage

affected those working on a piece-work basis as well as those being paid by the hour because piece-work rates could not be less than hourly rates. In 1932, at the instigation of the management of G.W.G., which requested a six-month probationary period during which seamstresses would earn piece-work rates even if they could not work fast enough to earn the minimum wage, the rates were amended to read:

> ... $6.00 per week for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th months provided that in garment manufacturing where work is paid for on a piece-work basis, the rate of wages to learners during the 1st six weeks of employment shall be that amount earned at the said piece-work rate prevailing from time to time during the said period of six weeks, and that following the said period of six weeks the rate of not less that $6.00 per week shall apply.

From five to eight months the rate was increased to eight dollars; from nine to twelve months it was increased to ten dollars and after the year's apprenticeship they earned the minimum of twelve dollars and fifty cents per week.[22]

W. Bligh Shaw, Superintendent of Great Western Garment echoed concerns about the minimum wage:

> From time to time it is necessary in the garment industry to transfer some employees and even whole departments to another class of work. It frequently happens that when a department finishes their own particular class of work for the season we could to our own advantage discontinue that department, but in order to provide work for those employees we teach them another class of work.[23]

Employers did not want to pay minimum wage to those learning a new operation. Therefore a handicapping system was established to allow individuals to work for less than the minimum wage. Individuals were periodically "given permission to work at rates they may be able to earn from piece-work under the rates in existence,"[24] to be paid by the piece, rather than by the hour. The piece rate was established by the competent, efficient seamstresses. None of the people interviewed

could recall the handicapping system although government records indicate that it was used extensively. Employee lists of over one hundred people handicapped for one reason or another are on file in the Provincial Archives. The fact that former employees do not remember the system, and the reference to operators being 'made up' in Lillian Morris's letter (quoted below) suggests that the government compensated these employees for the difference between what they were able to earn and the minimum wage.

A number of companies took advantage of the opportunity to apply to the Minimum Wage Board for permission to handicap employees from ten percent to twenty-five percent, meaning the company would pay ten to twenty-five percent less than minimum wage. Each case was considered individually. For example,

> Mrs. Critchley who was employed as embroiderer at Emerys Garment Works had been informed by her employer that, unless she could get a permit from the Board to work for the amount she could earn at rates paid by this firm for this class of work, her services must be dispensed with. Miss Critchley has been employed for four years with this firm and is able to make more than minimum amount on [the] average run of work but, on certain classes where the amount of work is out of proportion to the amount of remuneration can not make minimum. The Board decided that there were no reasons why Miss Critchley should be considered handicapped.[25]

No doubt, where garments required particularly extensive or intricate embroidery Miss Critchley had to take more time to get the work done. Emery did not want to pay extra for this additional time. Unfortunately, Miss Critchley was the loser as she was then out of a job.

In addition to handicapping due to a change from one machine to another, or from one class of work to another, manufacturers often requested a handicap when, due to personal illness or hardship, the

employees were not able to work as hard as they had previously. A letter from Walter Smitten, Commissioner of Labour to Judge A. A. Carpenter, Chairman of the Minimum Wage Board, dated February 23, 1932, is particularly interesting because it provides insight into the lives of the workers. At the request of the Manager and Superintendent for Great Western Garment, Mr. Smitten asked the Inspector, Mrs. Coombs, to investigate the cases of ten women. The women had all been transferred from one type of work to another to determine if it would be possible for them to earn the minimum wage. When this did not work the company considered firing them but, when informed of their circumstances at home, appealed to the Commissioner of Labour to consider the women handicapped. The cases are as follows:

Mrs. A. Huxley:
Widow, with 4 children, age 45. Recently discharged from hospital having had an operation for cancer of the breast. Recommend that she be granted a 25% handicap for a period of six months, and that a further investigation be made at that time.

Mrs. M. Dutchuk:
Married, 4 children, age 29; employed with firm 7 years. Husband at present in Mental Hospital in Ponoka; woman is rather frail and is worrying. Recommend 25% handicap for a period of six months with a further investigation at that time.

Mrs. Lewis:
Widow, age 53. Very heavily built. Mrs. Lewis has previously been granted a handicap of 20%; recommend handicap be increased from 20% to 25%.

Miss Anna Pololan:
Single, age 31: this woman is very thin and anaemic. In view of her physical condition would recommend a handicap of 15% for a of period of six months, with a further investigation at that time.

Mrs. A. Ritchie:
Widow, one son and father to support; age 46 years. Recently recovered from an accident in which two ribs were fractured. Recommend a handicap of 15% for a period of three months. Handicap necessary only as a result of accident.

Mrs. L. Byers:
Age 57: supporting two children attending school. Due to age and physical condition recommend a handicap of 20%.

Mrs. Paranchy:
Age 36: supporting three small children; had trouble with her husband recently, was abused and he finally threatened to shoot her. As a result of this she is suffering from nerves but it is expected will improve shortly. I recommend a handicap of 15% for a period of six months, with an investigation at the expiration of that time.

Mrs. S. Oldfield:
Age 47: has been with firm 14 years; just returned to work after an absence of 5 months due to illness; husband suffering from cancer; in view of recent illness and taking care of husband would recommend a handicap of 15% for a period of 6 months, with a further investigation at that time.

Mrs. Madsen:
Married: age 38: supporting herself and one child. This woman was employed in examining work; has only been on machine work for four months. Recommend she be considered as an employee changing from one class of work to another for a period of four months, and that rates earned during that period be acceptable.

Mrs. Olympic Civikilowsky:
Age 38; previously employed in the mackinaw department, earning from $25.00 to $30.00 a week, now due to change in employment recommend she be considered as employee changing from one department to another and her earnings be considered as minimum for a period of three months.[26]

The brevity and matter of fact approach in presenting these cases suggests that these situations were not considered extreme. What is perhaps even more revealing is the reply from Mrs. Lillian Morris stating that a fuller report was required to determine how many Great Western Garment employees were falling behind the minimum wage in order to determine how many handicaps should be offered and to be able to address each case individually. She wrote,

> I am convinced that if we granted handicaps to the ten mentioned in your letter, within a month that many more, and some of them even older, and with as bad disabilities will also be asking for

handicaps.

> For the handicap to be of any benefit to the ten mentioned, it will have to be the difference between what they make and the minimum wage as the Company have [sic] made it quite clear they will not make these operators up. I am quite sure a 25% would be required for all of these women. It should be remembered, if they make over the handicap as allowed them they receive it anyway.[27]

It would be interesting to know how many of the employees were suffering similar hardships but neither the records nor personal memory give any indication. Certainly the lists of employees offered handicaps are extensive but the reason is not often given.

The other significant fact revealed by these situations is that the women's incomes were often vital to the welfare of the family, not supplementary. They were not second incomes; but, whether due to her husband's absence, mental incapacity, death, abusive nature or illness, the woman was supporting her family. Women also mentioned that due to general unemployment men often had more difficulty finding jobs than women did. One former G. W. G. employee noted that she worked throughout her marriage taking as little as two weeks off to have a baby. Her husband, a printer by trade, was often unable to find work of any sort and would stay home to care for the children.[28]

This situation was typical; Eliane Silverman notes in The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930, that:

> Those who worked usually expected employment to be temporary; they would work until they married, or until they could buy a house or a farm, until, until ... They rarely defined themselves as workers and therefore did not pressure employees (as working men had begun to do) for higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions.[29]

Silverman's observation does not hold true for operators in garment manufacturing. These women were aware that their incomes were essential to supporting their families. In The Canadian Prairies: A

History, Gerald Friesen notes that during this period,

> Most workers' households would have required supplementary income; whether a wife took on a part-time job, a daughter spent a few years as a domestic, or a son brought home his wages from the time he entered his teens, the working-class household was a viable economic unit only with these supplements. The loss of the main breadwinner's job because of illness, mistakes, or an economic slump could cause serious problems.[30]

The examples provided from Great Western Garment suggest that Friesen could have placed even more emphasis upon the importance of wages of family members other than the husband or father. In some cases women worked to provide luxuries or self fulfillment but these were the minority.

Wages and hours of work tell only part of the story of working conditions. The physical environment was also important. Fortunately, a number of early photographs of the factory workrooms at Great Western Garment exist; they provide some insight into what it was like to work there. Two Trasch photographs in the Ernest Brown Collection of the Provincial Archives of Alberta show the "Cutting Room" and the "Interior" in 1913.[31] The "Cutting Room" (Figure 14) shows long tables with multiple layers of denim laid out to be cut. The men on the left are using weights to prevent the fabric from slipping while using power knives to cut dozens of pairs of pants at a time. The man in the centre may well be inspecting the goods as he appears to be using a tape measure. The men on the right are probably stock boys, judging from the completed garments behind them. One young boy is shown towards the back of the room but neither his age nor his duties can be determined. Some juveniles were employed by G.W.G. despite legislation to prevent it. One long time employee started work in 1915 at the age of 14. The room itself shows provision for heat, light and fire

prevention.

The photograph of the "Interior" (Figure 15), although of poorer quality, makes a stronger statement because of the crowding of over a hundred workers in the room, the closeness of the machines, the piles of fabric and the clutter. One can almost hear the noise of the machinery. The women all appear respectable, clean, neatly dressed. The workroom appears bright with overhead skylights and area lighting. These photographs can be contrasted with one of the first factory in 1911 where cutting, sewing, finishing and storage were all in one room (Figure 16).[32] The room is a little messier, the workers more dishevelled.

The McDermid Studio's photographs of the workroom in 1916 are interesting because they show the same workroom as in the Trasch photographs three years later (Figures 17 and 18).[33] Little has changed. One might question how typical a day they have captured; although white was certainly fashionable at the time one wonders whether so many women would have worn white when working in such dusty surroundings. Note that the women in the foreground are all wearing flowers. Perhaps the strongest suggestion that the photographs were posed is shown in the comparison between the two; notice that the woman on the left with the glasses is wearing an apron in one but not in the other, as is a woman across the table from her; note also the changes in position of some staff members. Although the accuracy of the image of the workers themselves may be questioned the photographs do provide an accurate view of working conditions. The items mentioned in the legislation (chairs, hair pulled back, lighting, fire prevention) appear to have been addressed before legislation was passed.

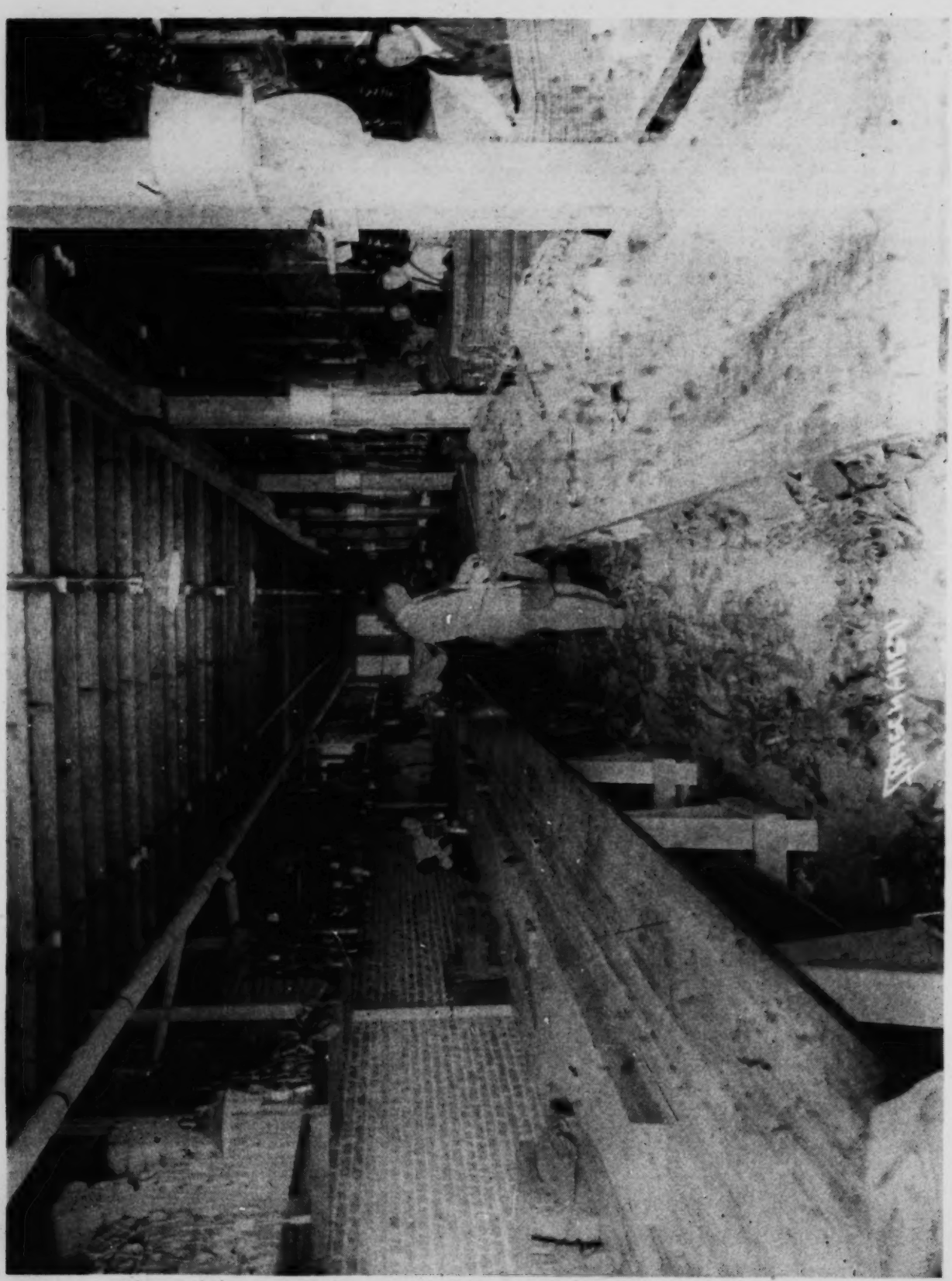

Fig. 14 G.W.G. cutting room, 1913, P.A.A. B1139

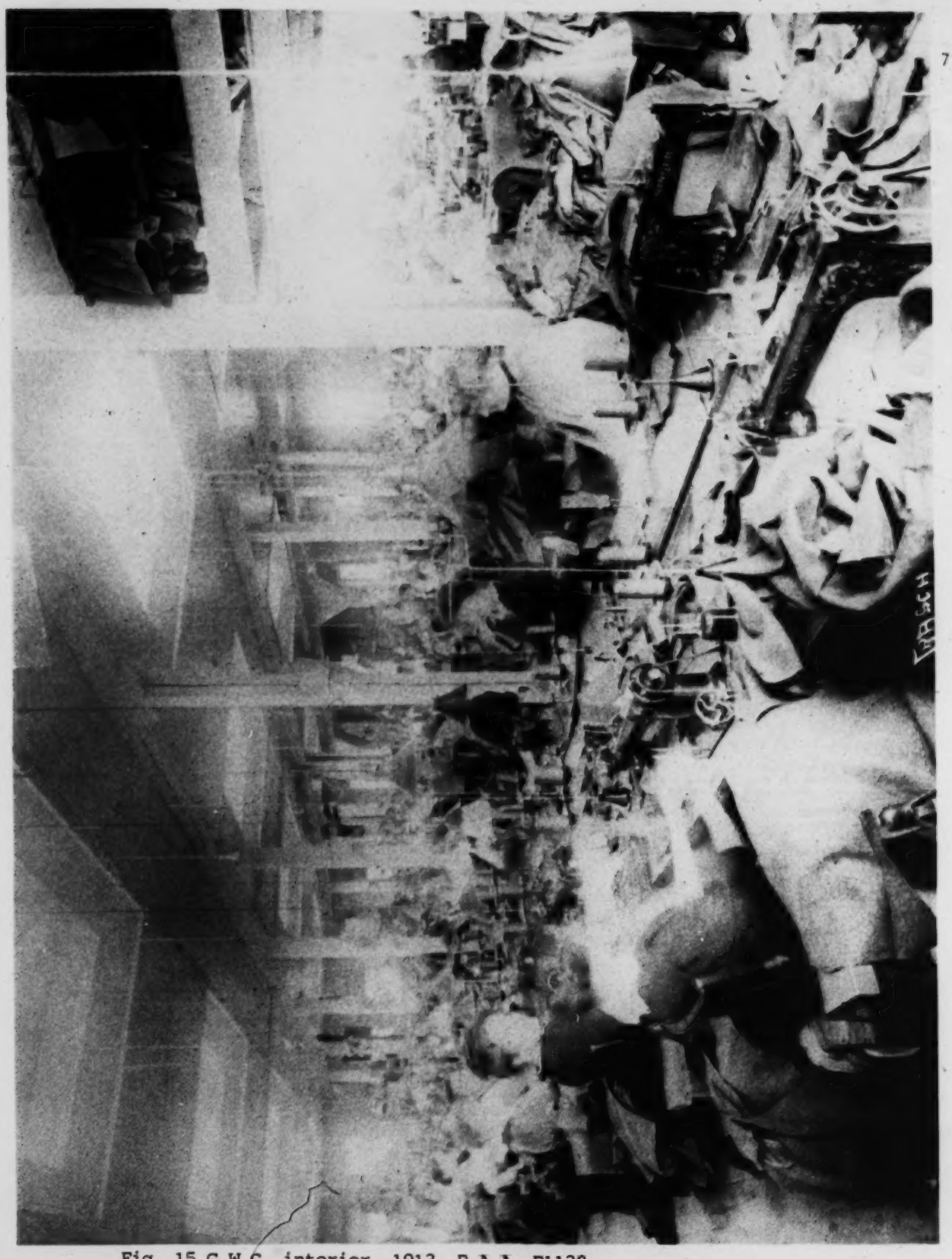

Fig. 15 G.W.G. interior, 1913, P.A.A. B1138

Fig. 16 G.W.G. interior, 1911, Glenbow Archives NC-6-62221

Fig. 17 G.W.G. interior, 1916, Glenbow Archives, NC-6-66519

Fig. 18 G.W.G. interior, 1916, Glenbow Archives NC-6-66520

Fig. 19 G.W.G. workroom, 1920, Glenbow Archives, NC-6-3269

Fig. 20 G.W.G. workroom, 1920, Glenbow Archives NC-6-3270

There is a noticeable difference in the McDermid Studio photographs of 1920, after the company's move to the factory at 10305 Namayo Avenue (97 Street) (Figures 19 and 20).[34] This is the work pants department; the room had less natural light so there was far more area light (area lights have been raised above the machines for the benefit of the photograph); the fire buckets have been replaced by extinguishers and hoses; the distance between machines is greater as there is room in front of the machines for garment pieces, and there are radiators in the middle of the room as well as around the perimeter. The comfort of the workers appears to have been considered more carefully. To what extent this was due to legislation, to pressure from the union, or to the company becoming established in new quarters cannot be determined. In fact Great Western Garment capitalized on their improved factory space as these photographs were taken as promotional material. They were featured in an advertisement in the Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal, July 7, 1920. The company too compared these photographs to the one of the first factory "where we made our modest beginning in 1911," and also showed a "fully equipped cafeteria [where] we furnish our employees with clean, wholesome, well-cooked meals at less than cost." The company was always conscious of its image as both conscientious citizen and as a western based business, as the captions illustrate: "In these light, tidy workrooms equipped with modern and scientific machinery, our girls are making your G.W.G. overalls, pants, shirts, and Mackinaw clothing:"

> These operators live in the West and spend their money in the West. They help create a demand for your work and for what you produce. Much of the money you spend for our goods stays in the West, and you have a good chance of seeing it again. Buy Western-made goods.[35]

Although no photographs of the factory rooms of LaFleche Bros. exist in archival collections, informants provided a view of working conditions. An employee of the firm in the 1920s noted that she started in 1921 at the age of 15 (her mother lied about her age) and earned $6 per week thread marking, marking stitching and fitting lines on cut garments. After 3 months her salary increased to $7.50; after 6 months $9.00; after 12 months $12.00, the minimum wage.[36]

She enjoyed working at LaFleche Bros.; she said "we were all one big happy family" and recounted stories of fellowship and various pranks such as the one they used to play on new boys who started:

> They sent him out to buy a yard of buttonholes, and they sent him to another tailor and said we're sending a fellow over to buy a yard of buttonholes would you ... you don't buy buttonholes by the yard ...(well I suppose you could for a fly front), so, okay, he'd go there and they'd say we're right out of them, and they'd send him to someone else, and they used to go all afternoon and then they'd get bawled out when they came back because he didn't have any, and he'd been a long time gone. But this Georgie Webb, he caught on right away, and, he went out and he said okay he'd go and get 'em and he went to a picture show - spent all afternoon in the picture show! That was the last one we ever sent![37]

She expected to work hard, and did from 8:00 in the morning to 6:00 in the evening with an hour for lunch and no coffee breaks. When the staff worked overtime their hours were 6:00 in the morning to 10:00 in the evening, with a dinner break and allowance. Although she recognized that the routine was usually steady work (in fact, she had to re-learn how to thread a needle holding it in her right hand so she did not waste time moving the needle from the left hand to her right hand to start sewing) she was philosophical about it, echoing the sentiments of other former employees, when she said: "when I think of what the people today demand, and what we were so thankful to have..."

Employees at LaFleche in the 1920s were predominantly males. In a

feature in the Edmonton Journal highlighting "A Quarter Century of Fine Tailoring in Edmonton," the firm noted that:

> The few women compared to men on the staff may strike you as unusual. Women are equal to men on many parts of the work, but they have a habit of getting married and all our years of training must be repeated, and it costs a lot of time and money to train a new employee in the organization.[38]

Mr. LaFleche's attitude was typical of employers who felt that it was not worth their energy to train women because women were only temporary employees. In the case of LaFleche Bros. this was true; most women who worked for LaFleche did not continue working after they were married or started their families. Because of the degree of handwork required and the level of skill of those working in fine tailoring it was not as easy for women to move in and out of work for LaFleche as for firms such as Emery's, Reynolds or G. W. G.

A recent letter written by a former employee of Emery's to her sister-in-law, the above mentioned women from LaFleche Bros., provides insight into working conditions at that firm in the mid 1930s. Edna Stirton started working at Emery's after taking an advanced dressmaking course that included pattern designing. The woman then designing samples for Emery's was leaving in a month to get married so Mrs. Stirton (then Miss Edna Moore) was trained for the position. She describes the process of designing, producing samples and having them discussed by the salesman and bosses. When there was not any design work to be done she assisted in cutting or marking garments.

> At the end of the year I was earning $12.50 a week if we worked a full week, sometimes we didn't work Saturday morning, there was no sick pay no coffee breaks we got two weeks off in the summer and I got as high as a $5 bonus at Christmas. Twice while I was there they took on another girl to do my job but neither lasted more than 2 months. I worked there almost 7 years and during that time I ran every machine at least once, folded dresses for packing, took stock answered telephone and other odd jobs. When I

> became engaged I got $1 a week raise Mr. Emery didn't want me to leave. Sorry about the mistakes but my mind runs ahead of my hand. Some of the girls who worked on piece-work on the better dresses could earn $20 or more a week but it was hard work they themselves would turn on the power 15 minutes to 8 and only take 3/4 of an hour for lunch. The girls had some social life together every spring we went on a hike (does anyone ever do that now) went to shows in small groups and had showers for those getting married and visited in one anothers homes. I would estimate [sic] Emerys employed 40 to 50 people counting the salesmen.[39]

Emery's was similar to LaFleche Bros. and G.W.G. in that the women worked hard but got paid well for it, once they had developed their skills. They all had social activities as well. G.W.G. used to have staff picnics out at Lake Wabamum.

Neither oral descriptions nor photographs of workers remain for other Edmonton based firms in period to 1935. One woman who had worked for both G.W.G. and Northwestern indicated that working conditions were similar in both firms but there is no specific data about Northwestern, Courtney, Reynolds or any of the short lived firms.

The labour force was generally conservative, grateful to have a job and willing to work hard for it. Management expected a lot of their staff but, at the same time, expressed appreciation for loyalty by providing bonuses or having get-togethers. Descriptions of the animosity between management and staff in Eastern Canadian firms are foreign to Edmonton. One factor in the general stability of the industry was the fact that labour legislation developed as the industry itself was in the initial phase. A number of firms were established in the years 1906-1916; the First Factories Act was introduced in 1917. Thus the government was able to provide protective legislation for workers, with the input of both labour and management, early in the industry's history.

Footnotes

1 Interview with Anne Ozipko.

2 Harvey A. Cobrin, The Men's Clothing Industry: Colonial Through Modern Times, (New York: Fairchild Publications Ltd., 1970), p.100.

3 "One Year Sees Great Advances in Labour Move," Evening Journal, August 28, 1911.

4 "Great Western Garment," Edmonton Journal, November 28, 1914.

5 Minimum Wage Act, Correspondence with Members of the Board. P.A.A. 75.409, Box 1-1-06-04.

6 The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour, 1926-1928, P.A.A. 70. 414.952.

7 J. J. Franley to Miss M. A. Hamilton, December 20, 1935. Minimum Wage Act. Suggested amendments to the Act. P.A.A. 75.490, 1-06-02.

8 The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour, 1926-1928, P.A.A. 70. 414.952.

9 Rebecca Coulter, "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931," In Joy Parr, ed., Childhood and Family in Canadian History. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1982), p.158.

10 Ibid., p.146.

11 The Department of Labour. The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada. (Ottawa, 1930), pp.26, 30, 40. P.A.A. 75-490 Box 1.

12 Ibid.

13 The textile industries were concentrated in Ontario and Quebec but the manufacture of clothing and other textile products is not so concentrated in the central provinces as are the primary processes of textile manufacture. Over 1,000 persons were employed in 1921 in these industries in each of the provinces of Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Alberta. Ibid.,p.42.

14 Coulter, p.158.

15 Ibid., p.6.

16 Interviews with Max Bedard, who started in 1919 and Elizabeth Shinbine who started in 1921. Louis Kabesh noted that this was no longer possible when he joined the firm in 1938.

17 "Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," January 12-14, 1928, Calgary, p.15. P.A.A. 75.490 Box 1.

18 Interview with Lillian Morris.

[19] Minutes of the Minimum Wage Board, April 8, 1925, November 2, 1926, P.A.A. 75.490, Box 1, 1-06-03; See also records of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta.

[20] Minutes of the Minimum Wage Board, March 5, 1925, P.A.A. 75-490.

[21] R.E. Emery, Manager Emery Manufacturing to Mr. John Blue, member of the Minimum Wage Board, April 15, 1935, P.A.A. 75.490, 1-06-02.

[22] Minutes of the Minimum Wage Board, May 20, 1932, P.A.A. 75.490.

[23] W. Bligh Shaw, Superintendent G.W.G., to W. Smitten, Commissioner of Labour, February 4, 1929, P.A.A. 75.490.

[24] Minutes of the Minimum Wage Board, May 4, 1923, P.A.A. 75-490, Box 1-06-03.

[25] Minutes of the Minimum Wage Board, December 15, 1923, P.A.A. 75-490, Box 1 1-06-03.

[26] Walter Smitten, Commissioner of Labour to Judge A. A. Carpenter, Chairman, Minimum Wage Board, February 23, 1932, P.A.A. 6.72.1.

[27] Mrs. Lillian Morris to Mr. Walter Smitten, Commissioner of Labour, March 2, 1932, P.A.A. 75.490, Box 1, 1-06-04.

[28] Interview with Elizabeth Shinbine.

[29] Eliane Leslau Silverman, The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930. Montreal: Eden Press, 1984.

[30] Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984), p.288.

[31] "Cutting Room," 1913 P.A.A. B1139; "Interior, 1913" P.A.A. B1138.

[32] "First Factory, 1911" Glenbow NC-6-62221.

[33] "Workroom," 1918 Glenbow NC-6-66520 and NC-6-66519. Note discrepancy in dates between Glenbow archives and Great Northern Apparel Archives; Glenbow dated photos 1915.

[34] "G.W.G. workroom," Glenbow NC-6-3269 and NC-6-3270. Note discrepancy in dates between Glenbow archives and G.W.G.'s advertisement in the Farmer's Advocate; Glenbow dated photos April 1918.

[35] G.W.G. advertisement, Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal, July 7, 1920.

[36] Previously she had been employed for two years in domestic service. She had not gone to school since coming to Canada in 1919 at the age of 12. Initially she had to stay home to look after her two year old brother while her parents worked; later she had to work herself after her mother was not longer able to.

[37] Interview with Mrs. Grimstead, nee Ivy Tarbox, employee at LaFleche Bros. 1921-1932.

[38] "A Quarter Century of Fine Tailoring in Edmonton," Edmonton Journal, Saturday, December 12, 1931.

[39] Letter from Mrs. R. Stirton to Ivy Grimstead, April 18, 1988; forwarded to the author by Mrs. Grimstead.

CHAPTER 5

The Government's Role, 1917-1933

The introduction of labour legislation, written specifically to ensure minimal standards of working conditions, was critical to the evolving character of the garment industry. Cooperation between government and manufacturers, particularly over issues such as the legislation of hours of work, ensured that garment manufacturers could compete with firms in Eastern Canada and Winnipeg by keeping labour and production costs down. Early legislation developed by the Province of Alberta included a number of measures designed to improve the lives of workers. Acts such as the "Eight Hour Miners' Act," the "Mechanics Lien Act" and the "Workmen's Compensation Act" were written during the first sessions of the Assembly.

Calls for labour legislation were heard as early as 1911 when the disastrous Triangle shirt waist factory fire in New York on March 26, 1911 killed 144, the vast majority, women. The follow-up stories remained on the front page of the Evening Journal for weeks. In response to the fire an editorial concluded that opponents to labour legislation

> forget that Edmonton is entering on the era of high buildings and varied industries. Unless we have proper regulations and the most rigid enforcement of the same we may be startled some day before long by hearing of some such occurrence as this in our own midst.[1]

Among the early pieces of legislation were "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories, Shops and Office Buildings," of 1917, and "An Act to Provide a Minimum Wage for Women," which grew out of the first and was passed five years later. The Minimum Wage Act was written largely for women in garment manufacturing, as may be seen in the records of the Board, which focus upon G.W.G. and other garment firms.

There was little large-scale secondary manufacturing in Alberta at this time; the largest garment manufacturing company was Great Western Garment which had three hundred employees, mostly women and girls, by the mid-1920s. Because they were unionized, the issues raised in legislation had already been addressed in their contracts. Much of the debate surrounding the legislation concerned the clause limiting the enforcement of the bill to cities with populations of over 5,000, which meant Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. In justifying this stand,

> H. Montgomery (Wetaskiwin) thought it should apply to cities only, because it was meant to protect the homeless girls, and in small towns there were no girls who suffered the inconveniences or conditions that were met with in the cities.[2]

Montgomery, and other members of the Assembly, felt that labour legislation was intended to provide minimal working conditions specifically for women and young girls.[3]

Wages were also a prime concern because of the number of women unable to earn a decent living wage. In 1913 the issue was raised within the community about the inability of women to support themselves. One proposal submitted to the city was that it should provide a grant to subsidize rooming houses for women from rural areas to prevent them from turning to prostitution or other desperate measures to pay their rent. The Trades and Labour Congress opposed this move because it felt that such a measure would condone low wages paid to women.[4] An article titled "Civic Progress: Dream of the Future: Big Local Industry," on June 7, 1913, listed the wages paid to various workers including, under garment workers, cutters at $20.00 per week and machinist operators at $12.00 per week on piece-work.[5] Other sources indicate that the starting wage was only $6.00 per week in the 1920s.[6] The wages quoted

in the Journal may well have been a "dream of the future" rather than reality. During the 1917 debates on the Factory Act, C. W. Cross said:

> there was a factory in Edmonton in which 250 girls were employed at an average wage of four dollars per week, and the object of the bill [the apprenticeship clause thereof] was to prevent girls being employed for a period of one year and then being discharged when they asked for an increase.[7]

It was difficult for girls to earn a living wage because their wages were considered to be supplementary to their husbands' or to their families' incomes rather than essential to their survival.

Factory legislation had been demanded by labour groups in Alberta for a number of years. The legislation that was developed was similar to other labour legislation in Canada at the time, with the exception of the child labour and minimum wage clauses. The Edmonton Journal reported in 1917 that:

> It was surprising but true that in this new country, there were hundreds of young children employed in factories and shops who should be going to school and getting an education.[8]

It also noted that the Factories Act marked "the introduction for the first time in all Canada of the principle of the minimum wage law."[9] The legislation and visual record combine to provide an image of working conditions.

The Act stipulated the ages, hours of work and salaries of workers. It stated that the employer had to keep a register of employees, giving their names, tasks and wages, available to an Inspector. These were the clauses that generated the most discussion in the legislature and that were the most significant. Juvenile labour was curtailed as people under the age of fifteen could not be employed in a factory, shop or office. However, young people looking for jobs knew that they had to say they were fifteen and could be hired at a younger age if they "had

the height."[10] A minimum wage of $1.50 per shift for regular employees and $1.00 per shift for apprentices with less than one year's experience was established. The lengths of shifts varied. During the day hours of work were limited to 10 hours between seven o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening with a minimum of one hour for lunch between eleven and two. An evening shift could be no more than eight hours between six o'clock in the evening and seven o'clock in the morning. Wages were to be paid regularly twice a month.

An examination of the provisions of the Factories Act provides a graphic picture of working conditions during the period. The Act governed the physical environment of workers, such as construction and layout of factories, safety of machinery, regulation of elevators, ventilation and drainage. The employer was responsible for providing prevention of, and protection from, fire and notifying the Factory Inspector of any accidents, explosions or deaths. Similarly, when outwork, or homework, was undertaken the Inspector was to ensure that the place of manufacture was clean and sanitary and to issue a permit stating the maximum number of individuals that could work on the premises. If any garments were found that had been made in unclean or unhealthy conditions, or upon premises not included on the manufacturer's ledger, the Inspector could seize and impound them, identifying them as "unsanitary" and forwarding them to the Local Board of Health for disinfection. The Local Board of Health was also to be informed of where the garments were made to enable them to inspect the premises and take whatever necessary action.[11] In A History of Labour and Social Welfare Legislation in Alberta, the Research Division of the Alberta Department of Labour states that the Act was designed to protect

the public from the dangers of homework which had been experienced in other garment manufacturing centres.[12] There is no evidence to suggest that industrial homework was carried on to any extent in Alberta beyond independent dressmaking, millinery and tailoring.[13]

There were a number of clauses which applied specifically to women. These were included in Canadian legislation at the urging of the National Council of Women and are discussed by Alice Klein and Wayne Roberts in their article "Besieged Innocence: The 'Problem' and Problems of Working Women, Toronto, 1896-1914." For example, the following clause was derived directly from Ontario's legislation:

> the employer shall at all times provide and keep therein a sufficient and suitable chair or seat for the use of every such woman permanently employed, and shall permit her to use such chair or seat when not necessarily engaged in the work or duty for which she is employed; and the employer shall not by any open or covert threat, rule or other intimation express or imply, or by any contrivance, prevent any female employee from using such chair or seat.[14]

According to Klein and Roberts, "Seats were deemed important because extended periods of standing up were thought to be harmful to the reproduction organs."[15] The concerns of social reformers were for the moral environment of working women in contrast with labour's prime concerns: safety, wages and job security. Legislation focused on the women themselves rather than improved safety features by including clauses that indicated that women working in factories had to secure their hair to prevent it from coming in contact with machinery, shafting, belting or material being handled and were not permitted to clean machinery while it was in motion.

Questions such as juvenile employment, minimum wages, apprenticeship and handicapping were controversial. In 1920, when the Act was revised, labour argued for a reduction in hours but the employers, along with the

Canadian Manufacturers Association, fought any amendments. As a result, rather than reducing hours, a five member committee was established to consider hours, wages and the use of apprentices. The report, of January 6, 1921, based upon evidence heard at public sittings in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Calgary and Edmonton, recommended: a minimum wage of thirteen dollars per week for anyone under eighteen, or for women over eighteen, and eight dollars and fifty cents for apprentices (these rates were not accepted); that hours of labour be fixed by legislation rather than an Order in Council; that the proportion of apprentices not exceed twenty-five percent of the total employed; and the formation of a minimum wage board.[16] In 1922, the "Act to Provide a Minimum Wage for Women" established the Minimum Wage Board, which determined periods of employment or shifts as well as wages. Ironically, it stipulated that

> Every agreement by an employee to work for less than the minimum wage fixed by the board with respect to the trade or occupation in which she is engaged shall have effect as if that minimum wage were stipulated for therein.[17]

It also protected workers against firing as a result of bringing evidence to the Board. The Board reduced its effectiveness by attempting to meet the demands of both the employees and the employers. The Minimum Wage Act was credited by the Federal Department of Labour with decreasing the proportion of younger girls employed in the industries covered by the minimum wage.[18]

Even with the introduction of a Minimum Wage Act for women, women's wages remained significantly lower than men's. Although women did not predominate in manufacturing to the extent that they did in domestic service, women formed a large proportion of the labour force in garment manufacturing, which was a low wage, highly competitive industry,

particularly in some positions such as machine operators.[19] Division of labour along gender lines was a force in sustaining the low wages paid to women. In her article, "The Girl of the New Day; Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Veronica Strong-Boag observed that:

> The continuing introduction of new technologies frequently left precise sex jurisdictions confused. They sometimes offered employers the opportunity to shift from better paid men to cheaper women. Such substitution added to industrial turmoil without granting women any significant improvement in status or wages. The installation of more up-to-date equipment was commonly accompanied by a general speed-up. This was true, for instance, of Edmonton's Great West Garment Company which in 1929 installed 'special two needle machines,' allowing it both to cut staff and maintain production levels.[20]

Just as the replacement of shears by mechanical knives meant that cutting became a male dominated occupation, technologies making jobs simpler or physically easier meant that women could replace men and wages subsequently declined. The more highly paid, skilled positions such as cutter, machinist, salesman and manager were filled by men; women were primarily machine operators and examiners. The only management position women usually obtained was that of forelady.

Bonusing and piece-work were used in an attempt to avoid the minimum wage. Women were paid x amount per buttonhole rather than x amount per hour. The more they accomplished, the higher they were paid; however, if production increased greatly, the price per buttonhole would go down and women would have to work harder to maintain their previous salary. Some workers commented that piece-work was preferable to being paid by the hour. If a dressmaker was particularly skilled she could earn more than the minimum wage through piece-work. One woman commented that she was sorry to have been taken off piece-work and moved to inspecting because she would earn less money on the weekly rate.[21]

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Minimum Wage Board was concerned

about how to ensure a fair rate of pay for learners working on piece-work basis. Most of the records of the Minimum Wage Board from these years concern garment manufacturing, and the Great Western Garment Company in particular. They divided manufacturing into two main divisions: needle trades and other industries. In fact, garment manufacturing was considered such a significant aspect of the Minimum Wage Board's role that Mrs. Lillian Morris, who represented Local 120 of UGWA in the Alberta Federation of Labour during the late 1920s, represented employees on the three member Minimum Wage Board for ten years from 1924 to 1934.[22]

Great Western Garment's primary concern was the ability to move employees from one machine to another whether for the employer's benefit, allowing greater efficiency in meeting changing supply and demand, or, for the employee's benefit, offering the ability to ultimately earn more money on a machine requiring greater skill and to maintain constant employment. Factory Inspector H. M. Bishop observed of Great Western Garment that:

> This firm manufactures several different kinds of wearing apparel and is divided into different departments, namely Overall, Pant, Shirt, Mackinaw and Combination. I found that at certain seasons of the year different departments have a slack period, and that while one is slack another will be very busy. As an illustration, the staff of the mackinaw department finishes its season's occupation about the end of December with the result that these employees are laid off for a period of from six to eight weeks, during this lay-off the overall and pant departments are fairly busy, and would be able to absorb some of these employees (who in many cases have had several years training in that class of work, earning well above the minimum) but who would be unable to earn the minimum in this new line of work because they could not acquire sufficient speed on this class of work with the result that they are not employed, but often apprentices are taken on in the busy department while the older employees are compelled to wait until the season's occupations begin in their own line.[23]

He suggested that employers should be allowed to transfer employees from

one department to another to maintain continuous employment and to increase their familiarity with different machines and different classes of work. Similarly, employees should be allowed to transfer from one machine to another, taking a cut in pay in the short term but having the potential to earn more in the long run. A concern for employees was shown in moving employees from one machine to another in order to allow them to earn more money.[24] A change to the Act in 1928, as a result of this debate, allowed companies to apply to the Minimum Wage Board to provide lower pay following transfer from one department to another. G.W.G. then had its staff perform a primary function and have one or two alternate operations that they were trained in.

In 1926, when the Factories Act was again reviewed, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) was active in lobbying the government for more stringent regulations. They asked for an increase in compensation for those on Workmen's Compensation and less cumbersome administration of the programme; they pressed for a reduction of hours to eight from ten per shift and won nine hour days and fifty-four hour weeks. Their opponents,

> [The] Manufacturers' Association was again particularly active in its opposition to the new Factories Act. The solicitor for the Canadian Manufacturers' Association was brought from the East to assist in interviewing the government and preparing the employers' case against the new Act. [The officers of the Alberta Federation of Labour] used all possible means to combat the influence of the lobbying campaign.[25]

The AFL lobbied for the extension of the Minimum Wage Act to cover men as well as women and proposed an increase in the minimum wage to fourteen dollars per week as "at least $14.00 per week was required to provide a proper living for a female worker who was dependent on her own earnings."[26] They were unsuccessful in influencing the government but

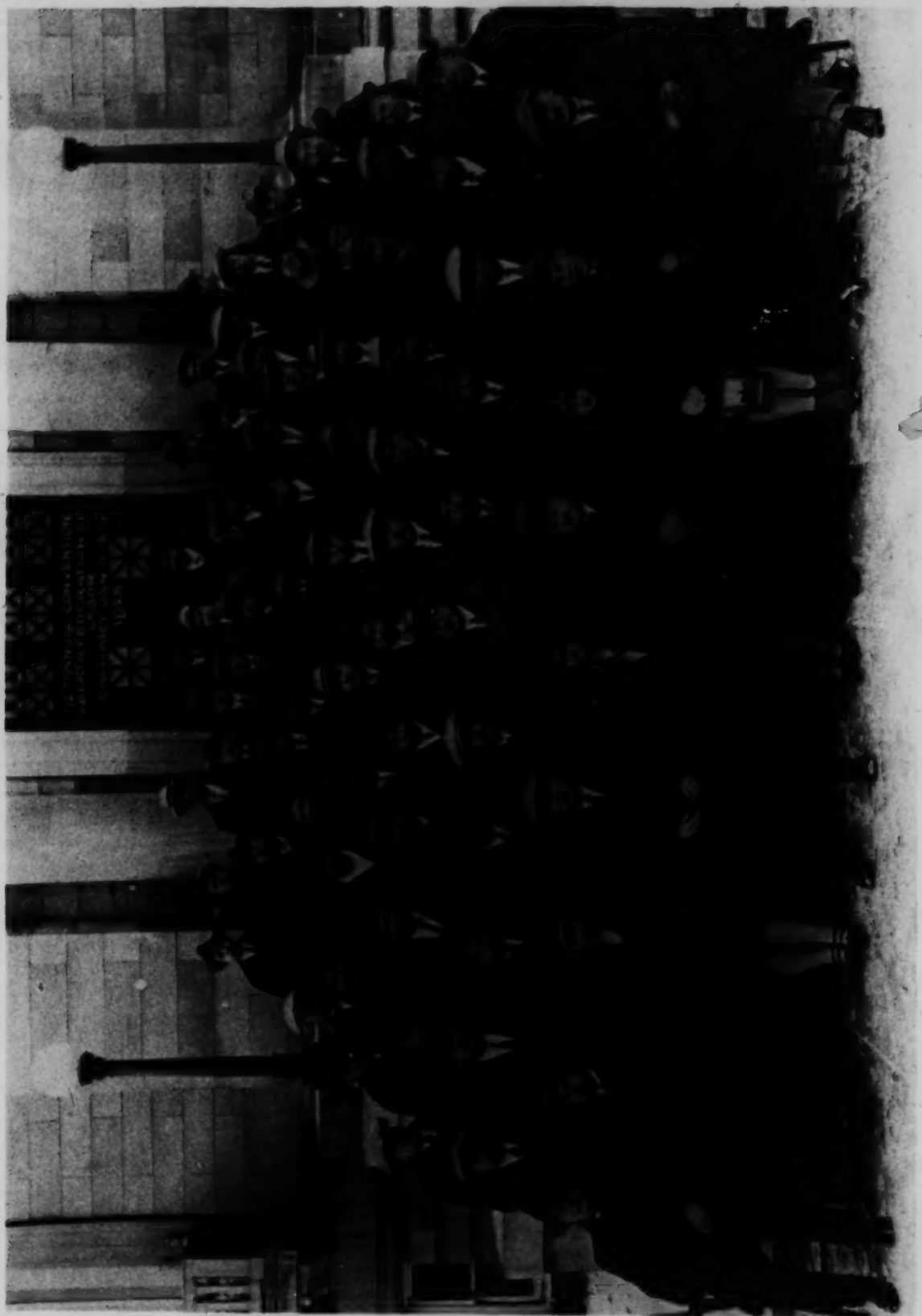

Fig. 21 A.F.L. convention, 1928, P.A.A. A16144 Courtesy Lillian Morris

continued arguing their case for several years.

When the new Factories Act was introduced in 1926, many of the provisions were comparable to those of the earlier legislation (although much more detailed) but recent legislation, such as the Minimum Wage Act and the Public Health Act, was taken in into consideration. For example, men were not permitted to work for less than the minimum wage established for women, and apprentices had to be indentured and receive proper instruction. The most significant change in the Act, however, was the limitation of hours of labour to nine per day (fifty-four per week) and the establishment of a three member Commission to

> cause inquiry to be made into and concerning the questions involved in the establishment of a forty-eight hour working week and as to the advisability of the establishment of the same with regard to all industries in any factory, shop, office or office building and the probable effect thereof on any such industries.[27]

The list of companies affected included, among garment manufacturers: boot and shoe factories, clothing factories, dress making establishments, dress shield factories, garment works, glove factories, hat factories, hosiery factories, knitting factories, millinery shops, shirt factories and tailor shops. This reflected the concern with growth both realized and anticipated in this area.

The Commission to consider the forty-eight hour work week consisted of Judge A. A. Carpenter, Chairman; Norman Hindsley, representing the employers; and Elmer E. Roper, then Secretary of the Alberta Federation of Labour and editor of the Alberta Labour News, representing the employees. The Commission searched the records of the Bureau of Labour, sent notices to all factories and held hearings in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Calgary and Edmonton in December, 1926. The result of this activity was two reports, a majority report submitted by Judge A. A.

Carpenter and Norman Hindsley and a minority report submitted by Elmer E. Roper. Limitation of the work week to fifty-four hours per week and nine per day in the Factories Act of 1926 had been at the instigation of labour organizations. Further reduction was requested for a number of reasons including: precedents, (the forty-eight hour week was recommended at the International Labour Conference in Washington in 1919, and a large number of industries were working an eight hour day); efficiency (to protect employers who worked their employees shorter hours from competition from those who worker their employees longer hours, and recognition that people working shorter hours were more efficient); and finally, the welfare of employees (that shorter hours would provide more leisure time for employees and allow employment for a greater number of men).[28]

The general objections on the part of employers were based on competition and regulation of labour. The government's bias towards agriculture was shown by their concern that the restrictions imposed upon industries connected with agriculture would inflict hardship upon farmer clients. The Commission considered both the forty-eight hour week and the eight hour day; there were stronger objections to the eight hour day, which would guarantee a day of rest, than to the forty-eight hour week.[29]

The Canadian Manufacturers Association, Alberta Branch, encouraged its membership to write to T. Ashenhurst, Assistant Secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers Association or to the Premier, J. E. Brownlee, who had requested a list of factories working over forty-eight hours per week that could not successfully operate on forty, opposing the forty-eight hour week, It forwarded all correspondence and wrote a summary of

the situation for Brownlee outlining most of the objections noted above. The CMA also joined companies, Boards of Trade and Merchants' Associations in opposition to the proposed legislation.

J. A. LaFleche, who employed forty men working fifty-four hours per week, wrote protesting the forty-eight hour week on the basis of competition, production and the welfare of employees. Mr. LaFleche's letter is quoted at length because it is typical of the concerns of employers and provides insight into the circumstances of the wholesale tailoring trade:

> 1). Competition. From the standpoint of value LaFleche clothes are produced and sold in competition with that of Eastern firms operating in many cases on a ten hour day. To impose an 8 hour maximum is in reality to bonus an outside product, as against that produced here in our own province by our own citizens, which is manifestly unfair. There is already, as may naturally be expected in a new country, a higher overhead to be reckoned with and it does look like bad business to further increase our burden.
>
> 2). Production. The nature of our particular business, that of high class tailoring, renders an 8 hour law a greater menace than to concerns producing on a factory basis. Fine tailoring is a skilled trade -it cannot be crowded or handled on a mass production basis - it requires time and individual work. An 8 hour law, therefore means a direct tax on the earning capacity of our employees. Tailoring business is besides a very seasonable line. Under present conditions we have striven to provide continuous year round employment for our staff. If the 8 hour law were to be imposed we should have to increase our staff greatly, at the height of the season, only to throw them out of work during the quiet months. This works against the efficiency of our organization and produces higher costs. It also creates conditions of unemployment in the off season.
>
> 3). Welfare of Employees. There are now forty people on our payroll - all earning decent Western wages, and they are contented. We have never had a disagreement with our help. In the eight hour law you have the fore-runner of the piece-work system in the lower grade shops, which leads ultimately to sweat-shop methods. Both of these latter conditions are to be shunned by any decent self-respecting working man.[30]

Interestingly, LaFleche also sent a letter to Brownlee outlining the same objections but also including a petition signed by his employees

stating they were in opposition to the forty-eight hour week. LaFleche switched to the piece-work system shortly after writing this letter. (LaFleche was joined by the Calgary Knitting Company, manufacturers of pure wool and worsted sweaters, and twelve other firms in forwarding petitions signed by employees). No doubt the thought of being laid off in the off-season encouraged the employees to sign. In fact, during the debate, Fred White, Calgary Labour member who spoke in favour of the new legislation, said that petitions from employees who were not in favour of the proposed act were obtained by coercion.[31]

The Calgary Knitting Company used trained men to operate their machinery. Women were only employed in the office. The men worked seasonally with only six to seven employees working in the spring but fourteen in the fall. Their hours also varied from about seven per day in the spring up to eleven in the fall. Ho Lem, the manager, felt that trained men would not accept positions just for the fall so they needed the flexibility of being able to work eleven hours in the busy season in order to keep a smaller number of men employed year around.[32]

L. W. Caldwell Ltd., Manufacturers and Importers, another knitting company based in Calgary, also wrote to the Canadian Manufacturers Association, in opposition to both the eight hour day and the minimum wage for males, with more graphic justification than that provided by LaFleche:

> We would however be affected by the restriction because of seasonal rushes of business which come three to four times in the year, when through weather or other conditions, merchandise is wanted in a hurry, for instance an early frost at harvesting time necessitating a rush supply of heavy socks for the harvesters. It usually means only a few days during a three month period but our hands must not be tied if the business is to be held in competition with the East.
>
> A great many businesses in Alberta like ourselves are in their

> developing stages. During the first few years of the manufacturing business, it is always a question as to whether it can survive the difficulties encountered and at least sympathetic considerations if not help is necessary, rather than throwing obstacles in their way. A definite impression has been given that the Government is hostile to and does not want any industry in Alberta except farming and coal mining. Anything done for the farmers and coal miners has our unqualified support and we commend the Government for it, but why kill the rest? We at least help to provide a home market for some of the farmer's products.[33]

Opposition to the establishment of a minimum wage for males may have been a tactic to force the exclusion of women from some trades by having to pay them a minimum wage but not men, as it had been in Britain and Ontario. The question of competition with Eastern firms was a recurring theme in the early economic development of Alberta. In addition to the concern expressed by LaFleche and Caldwell, in reference to hours of work, Great Western Garment provided a comparison of minimum wages in other provinces when defending their stand against raising Alberta's rates in 1933:

> In the Province of Quebec, the rates are from $10.00 to $12.00, with two year apprenticeship periods; Ontario $10.00 to $11.50; Manitoba $12.00, less 10%, or $10.80; Saskatchewan $14.00, less 10%, net $12.60; Alberta $12.50, and British Columbia $14.00...[34]

Wages paid to workers had a strong impact upon competition because higher wages increased the cost of production. This increase was then passed on to the consumer. C. A. Graham, president of G.W.G., elaborated:

> with the clear understanding that there is no competition from Saskatchewan, the great volume of business that we compete for is western Manitoba, all of the Province of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, because it is more convenient to ship west, rather than East, Manitoba has by this influence and more favorable minimum wage legislation developed a substantial volume of business, we have thirteen direct competitors in the City of Winnipeg, who are working at a minimum of $10.80, rather than our $12.50, and I submit that unless we are put on a parity with Manitoba, we must of necessity lose the bulk of business, with consequent reduction in employment.[35]

Meanwhile labour had been lobbying to have the minimum wage raised to fourteen dollars per week since the mid 1920s.

The only garment manufacturing companies heard from were those which employed primarily men rather than women; they were also, of course, non-unionized shops. J. J. McCormack, of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, explained why most speakers were against the forty-eight hour week saying, "I notice that practically all cases that we heard from were cases where the employees were non-organized."[36] LaFleche wrote to the Secretary of the Hours of Labour Commission stating that the garment industry in Alberta was suffering from competition in the East and complaining about organized labour's involvement:

> Some of our labor friends may have some more scientific way of looking at it. They have tried to have our own staff see it their way, but as usual, with a contented staff, they have always failed, our class of employee being the kind of people blessed with common sense who could not be tempted to accept their alluring promises of big pay without an honest day's work in return.[37]

LaFleche Brothers employees did not form a union.

The majority report of the Commission concluded, to the disappointment of organized labour, that a further reduction of hours of work was not required at that time. Out of 10,683 employees in factories in the province, 7,262 were already working forty-eight hours or less; of these 1,300 - 1,400 were women whose hours were limited by the minimum wage legislation. The Commission noted:

> in some industries the hours of labor, largely through the organization of employees, are fairly uniform throughout the whole Dominion. Thus, in the manufacture of clothing, statistics from the Dominion of Labor Department show that a forty-four hour week is widely prevalent throughout the country and the effect of this is seen in the comparatively short hours of labour in this industry in Alberta.[38]

This conclusion was limited to those protected either by union contacts

or existing legislation not to outworkers, knitters or tailors whose hours were not limited.

The 1920s and early 1930s were years of determining how to apply legislation to garment manufacturing. Complex issues such as payment of apprentices, movement of employees from one department to another, handicapping, and hours of work were addressed. The answers are not black and white because, as the manufacturers indicated, in an industry where competition was critical, labour costs formed a high percentage of production costs; and where Eastern manufacturers were well-established it was difficult for employers to pay more. The manufacturers argued their position to the government and legislation was modified to accommodate their concerns. Labour groups continued to press for shorter hours and higher wages. The fact that these issues were raised but not resolved before the Depression further complicated the situation. Slowdowns and layoffs in one season, then overtime the next, were part of the nature of garment manufacturing. By the beginning of the Depression Edmonton boasted a number of well established firms, including Great Western Garment, Emery's, LaFleche Bros. and Reynolds Manufacturing. Many more short-lived ventures had been attempted. The ability of these firms to survive attests to the cooperation, not only between government and management, but also between management and labour. The challenge brought by the Depression was met with ingenuity and adaptation to changing demands.

Footnotes

[1] Editorial, Evening Journal, March 28, 1911.

[2] "Opposition Believed Measure Should Have Received More Mature and Deliberate Consideration than was Given in Legislature Before Prorogation," Edmonton Journal, April 6, 1917.

[3] Rebecca Coulter discusses the problems faced by young girls moving to the city for employment, their difficulty in getting a job, living on poor wages, and tendency towards prostitution as a last resort during periods of part-time work or seasonal layoffs in "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931," In Joy Parr, ed., Childhood and Family in Canadian History. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1982), p.153.

[4] "Trades Council Objects to Civic Grant for Girls," Edmonton Journal, February 4, 1913.

[5] "Civic Progress: Dream of the Future: Big Local Industry," Edmonton Journal, June 7, 1913.

[6] Interviews with Max Bedard and Georgina Graff.

[7] "House Giving Close Attention to Factory Act; Protection of Working Girls Its Object," Edmonton Journal, April 5, 1917.

[8] "Factory Act Has Passed Second Reading in House," Edmonton Journal, April 4, 1917.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Interview with Max Bedard.

[11] Statutes of Alberta, 1917, Chapter 20, "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories, Shops and Office Buildings."

[12] Research Division, Alberta Department of Labour, A History of Labour and Social Welfare Legislation in Alberta. (Edmonton, 1973?), p.16.

[13] Dianne Smith notes the regular appearance of advertising for homeworkers to work for the National Manufacturing Company of Montreal but does not indicate to what extent homework was actually undertaken and concludes that "Factory homework or outworking does not appear to have been a significant part of sewing activities in Edmonton." In "Dressmaking Occupations in Edmonton, 1900-1930," (M.Sc. thesis, University of Alberta, 1987), p.74.

[14] Statutes of Alberta, 1917, Chapter 20, Clause 25.

[15] Alice Klein and Wayne Roberts, "Besieged Innocence: The 'Problem' and Problems of Working Women - Toronto, 1896-1914," In Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shephard eds., Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930, (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), p.215.

16 Report of the Advisory Committee under Factories Act, January 6, 1921, Session 21 Paper No. 54. (P.A.A. 70.414.436).

17 Statutes of Alberta, 1922. "An Act to Provide a Minimum wage for Women."

18 The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada. (Ottawa: King's Printer, The Department of Labour, 1930).

19 Ibid., pp. 26-42

20 Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur, Volume 4, Number 4, 1979, p.140.

21 Interview with Georgina Graff.

22 Records of the Minimum Wage Board, P.A.A. 75.490; interview with Lillian Morris.

23 Mr. H. M. Bishop, Inspector, to Mr. W. Smitten, Chairman, Minimum Wage Board, February 14, 1928, P.A.A. 75.490.

24 G.W.G. Informants frequently mentioned consideration on the part of the firm; interviews with Max Bedard, Louis Kabesh.

25 "Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," November 22-24, 1926, Calgary, p.9. P.A.A. 75.490.

26 Ibid., p.11.

27 Statutes of Alberta. 1926. Chapter 52. "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories, Shops and Office Buildings." Clause 23.

28 Majority Report of the Commission re 48 hours working week, 8 February, 1927. (Minority Report Included therein). Sessional Paper No. 47. P.A.A. 70.414.560.23.

29 Ibid.

30 J . A. LaFleche to the Canadian Manufacturers Association, March 1, 1926, P.A.A. 414.560.23.

31 "Factories Act to Have Teeth Drawn," Edmonton Bulletin, March 20, 1926.

32 Ho Lem, Manager, Calgary Knitting Company, to the Canadian Manufacturers Association, March 1, 1926, P.A.A. 414.560.23.

33 L. W. Caldwell & Co. Ltd. to the Canadian Manufacturers Association, March 1, 1926. P.A.A. 414.560.23.

[34] Great Western Garment, written brief to the Minimum Wage Board, April 27, 1933. P.A.A. 75.490, Box 1 1-06-03.

[35] Ibid.

[36] J. J. McCormack. Evidence taken at a Labour Commission Enquiring into the question of a 48 hour week and 8 hour day, held at the Court House, Edmonton, Alberta on Tuesday the 14th day of December, A.D. 1926. P.A.A. 414.560.23.

[37] J. A. LaFleche to the Secretary of the Hours of Labour Commission, December 26, 1927, P.A.A. 414.560.23.

[38] Majority Report. op.cit.

CHAPTER 6

The Depression and Garment Manufacturing

The Depression did not begin dramatically in Edmonton. The city had survived previous depressions several times before and after World War I. Moreover employees in garment manufacturing were used to seasonal layoffs and shortened hours. In the beginning, the 1930s were no different. Manufacturers continued their negotiations with the Department of Labour; employees continued their conservative approach to labour reform. As the decade wore on, however, the impact of the Depression became more pronounced.

Most of the documentation about garment manufacturing during the Depression focusses on G.W.G. The company is unique in maintaining an archives and it published a number of catalogues, almanacs, trade letters and advertisements during the period. As well, most of the retirees consulted had worked at G.W.G.; therefore G.W.G.'s response to the Depression is easiest to recover.

G.W.G. thought of itself as a major force in garment manufacturing as it continued to adopt new technologies and business practices. For example, in 1927 it introduced a pre-shrunk 2.2 twill white back denim (referred to as Sno-Back because the reverse side was white). It was the first firm to use pre-shrunk denim and throughout the 1930s the company capitalized on being the first in the industry to patent new styles, trademarks and fabrics. A G.W.G. advertisement from 1930 announced:

> G.W.G. DID IT Three Years Ago! developed and introduced a new SHRUNK DENIM produced a new SHRUNKEN DENIM OVERALL The First in Canada! AND WE'VE BEEN DOING IT EVER SINCE...Having achieved the distinction of being the first in Canada to develop a shrunk denim we naturally looked for competition. Although we have actually

> been producing a shrunken overall for three years, our competitors will presently be telling the world about a marvelous new achievement... shrunken denim. We gave it a proper place in Western Canada three years ago.[1]

G.W.G. began 1930 on a note of optimism. Its "Monthly Trade Letter," dated January 2, 1930, referred to the sound base of Western Canada's prosperity in the late 1920s and stated that:

> To a certain extent, the rise in security prices for the past three or four years, which ended abruptly in October, did contribute to the general prosperity. To that extent, as one of the supporting influences, it has been withdrawn. Behind all of it, however, we have the tremendous strides in industrial and agricultural expansion: the increasing consumption of Western-made goods, and from a merchandizing standpoint a financial and inventory control that has been safe and sane. Speaking generally, there has been no great rise in commodity prices such as occurred before the depression of 1920-21; none of the symptoms of economic ill-health, which were so plain ten years ago, now call for attention.[2]

C. A. Graham, the company president, noted the opportunity to increase exports of Prairie foodstuffs to Europe, prospects brought by the opening of the Hudson Bay Railway, and the possibilities for the manufacturing sector of the Western Canadian economy. He concluded that:

> The company is looking straight ahead through 1930 with complete confidence that the people of Western Canada will continue to spend money to buy what they need. This company also has great confidence in the desire of the people of the West to enjoy and consume quality in their work clothing and the capacity of these same people to maintain an earning power which will enable them to fulfill their desires.
>
> We believe that if a lull does occur in business, then it is time for alert management to 'make hay.' If and when competition starts to feel weak in the knees or hesitant, that is the time to hit hard and fast. Many businesses have gained their leadership and dominance during a period of depression.[3]

Graham continued to be optimistic in 1931 and began to initiate his policy to 'make hay.' G.W.G's "Monthly Trade Letter" to merchants

stated, in January 1931:

> While it is unfortunate that wheat, the chief cash product of your customer, is unusually depressed, we must not overlook the fact that many of the commodities in the stores have been depressed far below their cost of production to ridiculously low levels. Many of these prices have been hammered down to the lowest levels in years, materially below the cost of production in some instances. History shows that there is a limit to the length of time goods will be produced to sell below cost. A period of low commodity prices sets in motion forces which always bring about an upturn later. This is just as true today as it ever was.[4]

Graham demonstrated his confidence in the turnaround of the economy by announcing the establishment of

> a new factory department for the production of fine broadcloth shirts. These new shirts are being made from preshrunk, sunfast materials in collar attached style, and will have a specific label - The Graham Shirt. Thousands of these shirts have already been sent out to the trade and many favourable reports have been received as to their washing and wearing qualities.[5]

In a number of ways the Depression was a period of growth for G.W.G. In 1931, Clarence D. Jacox, who would succeed Graham as president ten years later, joined the firm. He introduced assembly-line techniques and piece-work incentives. In 1932 the company's subsidiary, Canadian Cottons Ltd., was established in Montreal, with factories for the production of cloth later established in Cornwall and Hamilton. In 1934 it began production of youthwear and in 1936 expanded into ladieswear.

G.W.G. was the only Alberta company to patent any of its designs or trademarks. In 1930 it registered "stop-loss" pockets, a particular combination side opening hip pocket and top opening tool and rule pocket. In 1932 it registered the "red strap" contrasting strap on the bib pocket and hammer strap across the leg, and in 1936, followed with "Lochbar Suspender Slides:"

> Without a doubt the most forward step in overall manufacture

> that has occurred since we took the old hand ring buttons off overall jackets was the introduction of the Lochbar Suspender Slides ... Lochbar can be so easily removed and so conveniently readjusted that we now wonder why it was not thought of years ago.[6]

Trademarks patented by G.W.G. in this period included: "Red Dot" (1929); "Iron Man", "Buckskin" (1932); "Snobak denim" (1935); G.W.G. button design, sitting husky dog, wordmark "husky" (1936); drawing of a cactus plant, wordmark "texas ranger" (1937); and red strap (1939).[7] Clearly, faith in the future of the company was never shaken although retirees did describe periodic layoffs and slowdowns that continued throughout the Depression.[8] Management introduced new products and diversified in an attempt to stabilize their market and was no doubt comforted by the realization that people always need new clothes, particularly work clothes that wear out through heavy use.

During the Depression, companies developed strategies to help them through the lean years. LaFleche Bros. was perhaps the most adversely affected, due in part to the death of its founder which led to a legal battle to determine who should succeed him, but also to the nature of its business - fine quality clothing.[9] LeRoy LaFleche noted that the lack of capital circulating in the economy and the tendency of tailored clothing to last a long time (because of the way it is used) meant that sales were down.[10] However, LaFleche managed, largely due to the city contracts the firm was able to win. Other Edmonton based firms produced occupational clothing that wore out and required replacement. G.W.G. manufactured workwear; Emery produced housedresses; Reynolds and General Whitewear manufactured uniforms.

Reynolds Manufacturing did not yet have a firm base and floundered

during the Depression. Harold Reynolds had to go back to work as a cook at the Metropolitan Store during the day but continued to manufacture garments in his basement at night. His son Lloyd joined him in the business in the midst of the Depression. He remembers:

> Waitresses in restaurants bought their own uniforms in those days for $2.75 each at weekly installments of 25 cents. I picked up their quarters on Wednesdays so we could pay our girls on Thursdays.[11]

They persevered and were able to continue production in a hand to mouth fashion.

A more surprising phenomenon that occurred during the Depression was the establishment of new industry, although many shops were short-lived. Fibrebilt Neckwear Co. of Canada was listed in the Henderson's directory at 113, 10114 102 Avenue from 1933-1935; Midget Garment Co. at 8952 118th Avenue in 1933; Northern Manufacturing Co. at 10185 107 Street from 1933-1935; the American Pad and Textile Company at 105, 10114 102 Avenue in 1936 and Blanc Uniforms at 10718 Jasper Avenue in 1937. F. R. Scott and H. M. Cassidy explained this apparent paradox in their report, Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry, by saying that there are always men who think they can make good where others have failed, and described:

> One non-union shop in Toronto which we investigated [which] had begun operations during the depression, we were told, with less than $4,000, contributed by four men (one a manufacturer who had just failed in his former business, one a machine operator with a little money, one a unemployed salesman) who formed a partnership. This shop employs some 20 workers. With such a beginning a firm of the [sic] kind can solicit orders, can obtain a line of credit at a bank, can buy cloth in small lots from jobbers (or can get it on credit from jobbers or from mills, in some instances) and can operate for some time.[12]

This was essentially the situation of General Whitewear and Uniform

Manufacturing, established in 1935 in the basement of the Alberta Hotel by Robert W. McIntyre. He had been a salesman for International Stock Food and thought he might be able to make some money selling garments. He was joined by his daughter Roberta Walsh (now Watson) who had graduated from McTavish College in 1928-29 but could not find a job until she began to work for Courtney Manufacturing, then for Reynolds Manufacturing in the early 1930s. According to Arthur McIntyre who joined his sister and father in the business in the summer of 1935 after finishing high school, "there were no jobs to be had" so the family opened a business. They hired a cutter, purchased second hand machinery from Courtney Manufacturing and started production with a staff of about nine or ten, a number of whom were family members. The firm produced made-to-measure utility garments, white and coloured, for hotels and restaurants, nurses, barbers, mechanics etc. Almost all the sales were in Alberta but some orders came from Saskatchewan and as far north as Dawson Creek.[13] Seamstresses were paid piece-work rates but made entire garments rather than performing assembly-line functions. They tried to figure out the fastest way to make a garment so they could earn more than minimum wage. According to the McIntyres, as the minimum wage rose, so did the piece-work rates. The business became well established and operated in competition with Reynolds Manufacturing until 1965 when the family wound it up.[14]

Another strategy employed by management during this time period was close collaboration with labour. In the 1920s Local 120 of the United Garment Workers of America was concerned primarily with questions directly affecting families. It was the only union represented by women

delegates at the Alberta Federation of Labour Conventions, and, although they were not very vocal within the labour movement, occasionally they took a stand. In 1919, for example, Local 120 had demonstrated its conservatism when it was one of the few unions to vote against the general strike in Edmonton. One informant mentioned a strike that lasted about an hour in 1919; the staff all went out and sat on the fire escape. He could not remember what it was about.[15]

Local 120 rarely made any comments that were recorded by the AFL. G.W.G. was most vocal at the 1928 convention when Local 120's delegates proposed three resolutions. The first concerned the Maxine Beauty Shop's abuse of the Minimum Wage Act noted above. The other resolutions were:

> Resolved, That we petition the Provincial Government to make provision for deserted wives and families by bringing them under The Mothers' Allowance Act, as innocent children often suffer great hardships through no fault of their own.
>
> and
>
> Resolved, That we seek legislation making it compulsory for expectant mothers to cease their employment in factories, shops, etc., for two months before and two months after child-birth, and that where such a person is depending on her own wages, a sum be given her by the Government to tide her over the period.[16]

The former resolution was amended to include prisoners' wives and was passed by the convention but the latter was referred back to the resolutions committee for further discussion. The question of maternity leave had not been raised before to the Alberta Federation of Labour although it had been discussed at the International Labour Conference of 1919. AFL proceedings record that the Mother's Allowance Act was eventually expanded due to their lobbying.[17]

During the Depression, the Alberta Federation of Labour was primarily

concerned with issues such as unemployment which it felt was the responsibility of all three levels of government, the expansion of relief programs to alleviate suffering, and provision for unemployment insurance. Protecting the jobs of unionized workers also became a priority. G.W.G. was not specifically involved in any of the debates during the Depression. Unfortunately the union has no record of their activities or interests during this period. With the exception of Lillian Morris, whose memory of these years is limited, none of the informants were interested in the activities of the union.

The use of union labels was raised at the 1932 convention because the Trades and Labour Congress had adopted resolutions in support of union labels in September 1931.[18] Labour stepped up its campaign to encourage people to purchase union-made goods and to promote unions for workers as well. In 1935 a resolution was presented to the Alberta Federation of Labour's convention that:

> Whereas, the Dominion Government through the Royal Commission appointed to investigate the Trade and Industry of Canada have brought to light that certain industries have been paying low wages, and employees work long hours the like of which no supposedly civilized country should allow to exist within their borders.
>
> Whereas, the Union Label is a symbol of goods efficiently made. It is a sign of expert workmanship and honest endeavour to make the best possible product. It is a guarantee that workman are being paid an honest wage and working reasonable hours; therefore be it
>
> Resolved, That the Union Label, Shop Card, and Working Button be demanded at all times by loyal trade unionists. To do so, is to demonstrate both loyalty, common sense and good judgement, and give support to the movement which has given you a living wage, and good working conditions.[19]

The basis for the resolution was the report of the Price Spreads Commission chaired by Vancouver M.P. H. H. Stevens. Stevens criticized

firms, particularly major department stores, for unfair or unethical trading practices. They

> used their mass buying power to blackmail manufacturers into selling to them at unrealistically low prices; small merchants, unable to obtain their merchandise on the same terms were forced out of business. In the frantic scramble for survival, small manufacturers and retailers cut wages and imposed sweat-shop conditions on their workers.[20]

One of the consultants to the Commission was Harry Cassidy, co-author of the report Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing industry.

> The most dramatic price spread uncovered was revealed in the testimony of seamstresses who did piece-work for department stores. For sewing together a dozen dresses, Annie Wells told shocked M.P.s, she was paid 9 1/2 cents; each dress sold in Eaton's Toronto store for $1.59.[21]

Alberta companies, such as G.W.G., were forced to cut wages during the Depression but rather than exploiting labour, they worked to cooperate with labour to develop a loyal clientele. Perhaps the most visible evidence of labour's cooperation with management during the Depression was the trip that Lillian Morris, wearing men's overalls, made with a management team from G.W.G. They visited Drumheller to promote the union label on G.W.G. clothes, much the way the U.G.W.A. promoted the union label in the United States during the 1910s. Management at G.W.G. was proud of the fact that its garments were union-made and strove to emphasize that to other workers.[22]

This campaign continued throughout the Depression. In 1939, the U.G.W.A. was still crusading for people to buy garments marked with a union label to combat sweatshops. In a letter to Rev. R.B. Steinhauer of the United Church in Saddle Lake, S. La Pedes, Secretary-Organizer of District Council No. 13 (Canada) of the U.G.W.A., wrote:

> This is an urgent appeal through you to your congregation, to

help abolish sweatshops in the garment trade.

> Millions of garments are produced under the most terrible conditions, terrific speed-up and strain, with low piece-work rates -- undermining the health of the Canadian people.
>
> It is against this shame and poverty that our union proclaimed a crusade. There is a way through which your congregation can help change this situation.
>
> Your church stands for the principles of justice and fair wage for labour. A very effective way of helping to do away with sweatshops, is to buy union-made fine and work shirts, trousers, overalls, sportswear, vestments and choir garments.
>
> The only way to recognize a union-made garment is to look for the union label, emblem of free trade.[23]

Furthermore, La Pedes indicated that, "Upon request we will supply the name of the nearest merchant in your community dealing with union-made garments."[24]

The lack of unionization of garment manufacturing companies in Edmonton, other than Great Western Garment, is interesting to note. None of the other firms unionized. Informants seemed generally content with working conditions, particularly when compared to the alternatives. Garment manufacturing was an industry where sporadic employment was common; layoffs and slowdowns were simply more frequent during the Depression. Workers were often happy to have any job they could get and were reluctant to complain. N. Maurice Davidson notes:

> Even though the aim of a union is the improvement of labour conditions, the clothing workers were difficult to organize. Newly arrived immigrants, more interested in security than the immediate improvement of working conditions, were prepared to compete with their fellow job-seekers. The polyglot composition of the workers with different backgrounds, religions, and sympathies retarded the organization of a strong cohesive body.[25]

Davidson's comment that workers were more interested in security than in the immediate improvement of working conditions is true. However, that was not due to the composition of their ethnic backgrounds but due to the economic situation at the time. There was little interest in union

activities on the part of informants and they revealed no knowledge of issues such as the minimum wage and handicapping which dominate archival records. There were attempts to organize other firms in Edmonton but no doubt organizers focussed their attention upon larger manufacturing centres.

In their 1935 study of the men's clothing industry in Quebec and Ontario F. R. Scott and H. M. Cassidy noted conditions that parallel those of the garment industry as a whole in Edmonton. After describing the conditions encountered in one shop (far worse than anything described in Edmonton) the authors pointed out that:

> The fact that struck us most about this shop was that the workers, when questioned, had no complaints about their conditions of labour. They were all Poles, most of whom had never worked under any better conditions, and who, going home in the evening to rooms for which they were paying from $4.00 to $7.60 per month, must have found little contrast between their day and night quarters.[26]

The authors commented upon differences between the nature of the industry in Quebec and Ontario, concluding, as Davidson does, that the situation was better in Ontario because of the emphasis upon inside shops rather than contracting. Alberta compares to Ontario in that respect. The authors also note violations of both the Minimum Wage and Factories Act in Eastern Canada. Alberta had more extensive legislation for the protection of workers. No doubt infractions occurred in Alberta as well but the evidence is no longer extant.

Concerns about labour legislation faded to the background as workers were grateful for the ability to earn a living. As the decade ended and World War II began, the complexion of the industry changed once again: government contracts; women performing men's roles; wages restored.

G.W.G. again turned to the production of uniforms, including clothing for prisoners-of-war. In 1945 it produced 68,000 pairs of combination overalls; 15,0000 Khaki service trousers for the Netherlands army; 30,000 pairs overalls for Dutch marines; 65,000 flannel shirts for the army and 35,000 white drill shorts for the air force. The Canadian army ordered 38,400 pairs of combination overalls. Plant officials reported that, "in no way have the Netherlands orders reduced the output of civilian goods so far as the G.W.G. company is concerned."[27] During the war there were occasionally shortages of civilian cloth but G.W.G. was busy with nearly $4,000,000 worth of government orders between 1940 and 1945, with 25,000 articles of military clothing produced weekly.

The Edmonton Journal emphasised the importance of the war effort undertaken at G.W.G. It said of the employees that:

> In the fullest sense of the term they are key war workers, ranking with the employers [sic] of ammunition plants and women in the armed forces. Their job is a vital, important one, and they perform it with energy, devotion and high skill.

and of the company that it was:

> Definitely the largest garment factory in Canada, it was the largest in the whole British Empire before the war and may still be... In the First Great War, the plant played an important role, turning out scores of thousands of flannel shirts and other garments for the armed forces and war workers. But it did not really come into its own as a mass-producer of clothing until after the start of the present conflict.[28]

For G.W.G., the war marked a turning point. Staff increased dramatically, machinery was upgraded and assembly line techniques implemented further. The companies that survived the Depression established the foundation that enabled them to carry on in post-war Edmonton.

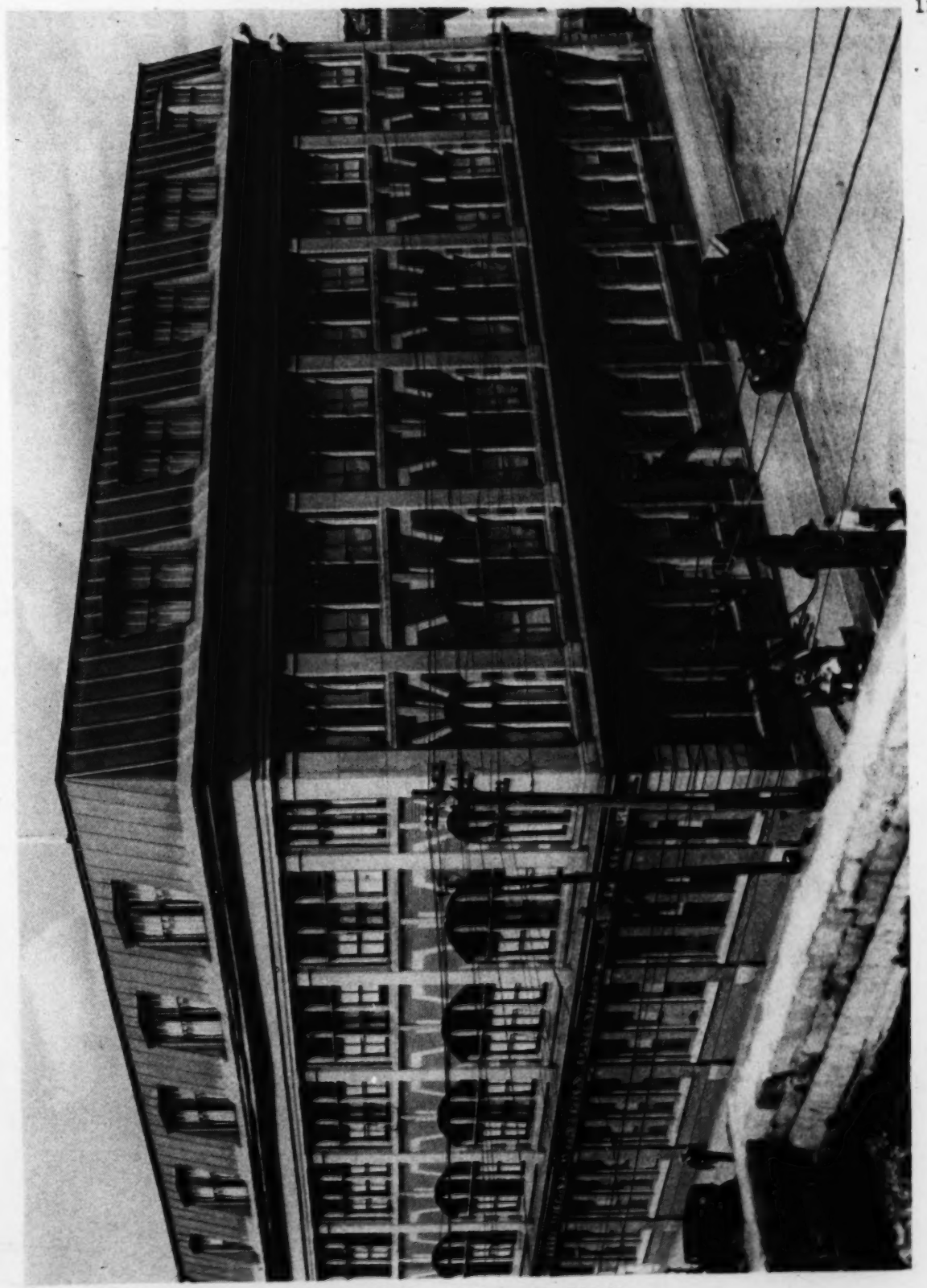

Fig. 22 G.W.G. exterior, 1937, P.A.A. BL 209/2

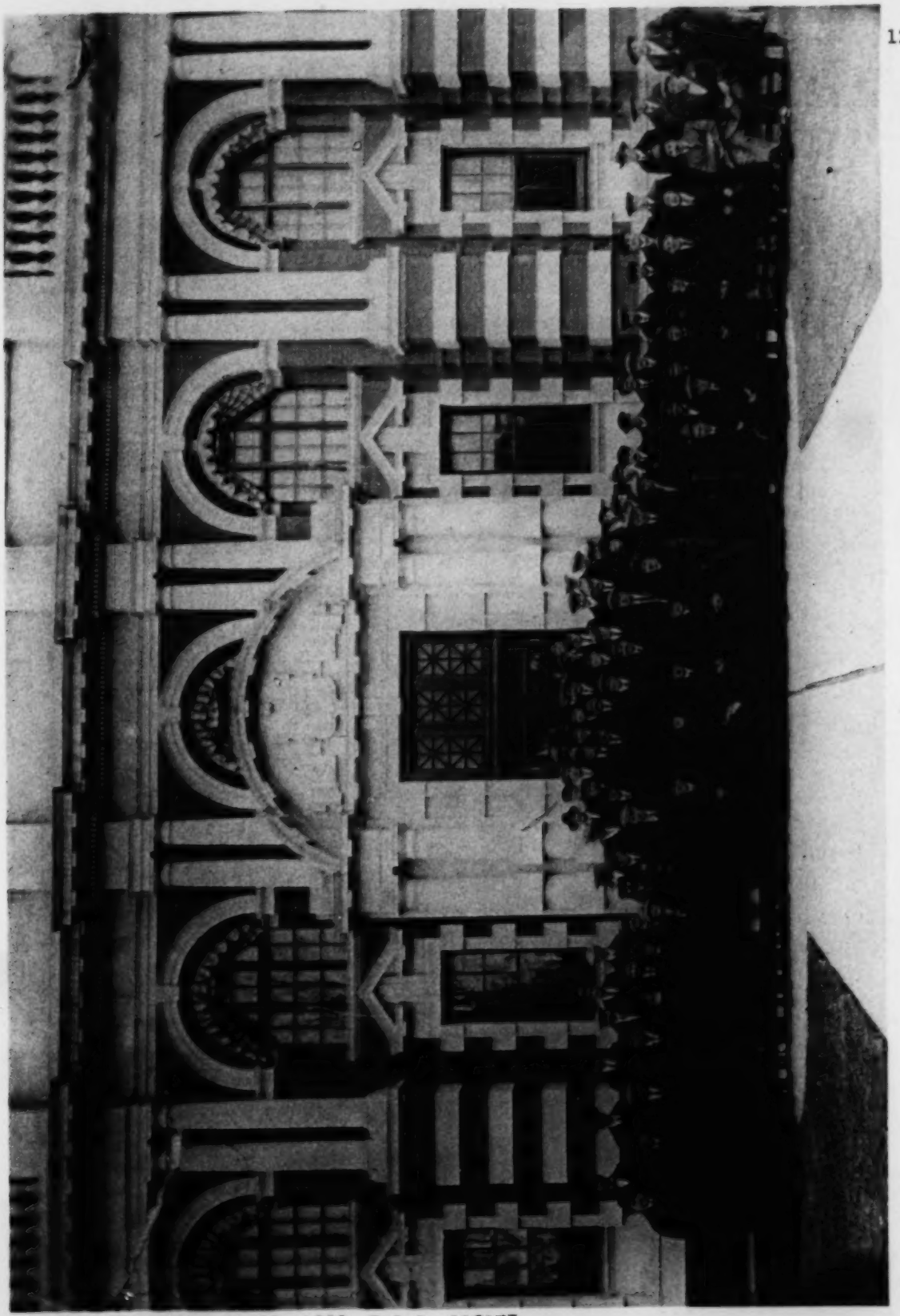

Fig. 23 G.W.G. staff, 1939, P.A.A. A16145

Footnotes

1 Records of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Canada, Hull, Quebec; G.W.G. archives, dated but unidentified advertisement.

2 "Monthly Trade Letter." The Great Western Garment Co., C.A. Graham President, Edmonton, January 2, 1930; courtesy G.N.A.

3 Ibid.

4 "Monthly Trade Letter," January 2, 1931.

5 Ibid.

6 Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Alberta: G.W.G. Sales Manual 1937, p.15.

7 Great Northern Apparel Files, Patents and Trademarks Branch, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Government of Canada.

8 Interview with Max Bedard.

9 Louis F. LaFleche and Joseph A. LaFleche both sought the position of head of the company. The records of Consumer and Corporate Affairs list various threats to sue the company but do not explain the underlying situation.

10 Interview with LeRoy LaFleche.

11 "Humble beginnings led to 60-year success story," Edmonton Journal, May 10, 1988.

12 F. R. Scott and H. M. Cassidy, Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry, (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1935), p.33.

13 At the time Reynolds was in a rented building with Northwest Tent and Awning. When there was not enough work the seamstresses made car radiator covers for Northwest Tent and Awning. Interview with Roberta Watson and Arthur McIntyre.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview with Max Bedard.

16 "Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour.: January 12-14, 1928, Calgary, P.A.A. 75.490, Box 1.

17 "Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," January 14-16, Lethbridge, P.A.A. 75.490, Box 1.

18 Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] J. H. Thompson and Allan Seager. Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), p.259.

[21] Ibid, p.260.

[22] Interview with Lillian Morris.

[23] S. La Pedes to Rev. R. B. Steinhauer, May 2, 1932, Glenbow 3LS822.

[24] Ibid.

[25] N. Maurice Davidson, "Montreal's Dominance of the Canadian Men's Fine Clothing Industry," M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1969), p.53.

[26] Scott and Cassidy, p.33.

[27] "425 Skilled G.W.G. Employees Busy on Government Contract: City Clothing Plant Hums With Activity Supplying Garments for Holland's People," Edmonton Bulletin, May 9, 1946.

[28] "Great Western Garment Handling Huge Orders," Edmonton Journal, April 18, 1942.

Conclusion

The story of garment manufacturing in Edmonton between 1911 and 1939 is not the story one might expect from the literature about related industries in Eastern Canada and the United States. There was an active if small manufacturing sector in the city during this period with the development of companies such as LaFleche Bros., Great Western Garment, Emery Manufacturing and Reynolds Manufacturing which have remained significant to the growth of Edmonton, as well as the short lived presence of numerous other firms. The story of garment manufacturing in Edmonton is not one of sweatshops, homework, ethnic division and gender exploitation but a story of manufacturers with a vision of the future and workers whose primary concern was providing their families with food, clothing and shelter.

Although Edmonton has never been considered a garment manufacturing centre its achievements in this sphere have long been underestimated. Edmonton-based garment manufacturing was not considered to be significant on a national scale but it was significant in local terms. All Edmonton based firms distributed goods throughout the Western provinces. The achievements of LaFleche Bros. and G.W.G. in the national arena should not be overlooked and by World War II, G.W.G. was the largest clothing manufacturing company in the British Empire.

Edmonton manufacturers were astute in recognizing their limitations and capitalizing upon their location. Garments produced in the "West" were intended for use in the "West." They produced custom made goods, workwear, knitted goods, housedresses and uniforms - all items that did not require sudden changes in design, fabrics or notions; in addition

all items could be distributed regionally. Advertisements of Edmonton based firms capitalized on the "Western-Made" aspect of their business. G.W.G. summed up the sentiment with its slogan "Made in the West for the West."

Edmonton manufacturers did face problems common to garment manufacturers generally, such as seasonal production, competition and the labour intensive nature of the industry. In many ways, Edmonton's story is similar to that of Toronto, Montreal or Winnipeg. However, there are important differences. Unlike Eastern centres, Edmonton manufacturers did not use homeworkers but relied almost entirely upon inside shops. Exploitation of immigrant labour was not a significant factor in Edmonton; in fact, Edmonton firms were notable for the level of cooperation between management and labour. Finally, labour legislation developed in Edmonton as manufacturing itself was developing rather than after the sweatshop system was well established as in Eastern Canada.

Labour legislation passed in Alberta was based upon similar laws established in Britain, the United States and Eastern Canada (particularly Ontario) but it was more comprehensive. Legislation initially dealt with working conditions and touched on hours and wages. In the 1920s, with the establishment of the Minimum Wage Board, Alberta led the way in defining hours and wages for women. Although legislation did not limit hours to the extent recommended by labour, it did ensure that the exploitation of labour that led to sweatshop conditions in other centres did not develop in Alberta.

Interviews with retired workers who were employed by various firms in

the 1920s and 1930s provided valuable insights into the nature of the industry at the time. Contrary to the goals of those writing labour legislation - to protect young women moving to the city from rural areas - those interviewed did not move to the city specifically to find paid employment but were either raised in Edmonton, or came with their families from Britain. They did not express a consciousness of a working class culture, as such, but were conscious of the fact that they were being put to work, initially by their parents as teenagers, to help support the family. After marriage working continued to be important as employment for both men and women of this class was sporadic and poorly paid. The strong British element apparent in the interviews does not represent the range of ethnic groups working in the field during the period.

Reminiscences are subjective and, due to the limited number of people contacted, can not be considered representative or comprehensive. However, the consensus about the equitable treatment they received from their employers in terms of good wages, consideration in choice of operations, and general working conditions; and their gratitude for regular employment during hard times counters the general interpretation of garment manufacturing as a sweatshop industry. Perhaps the strongest suggestion of harmonious labour relations is that throughout this period, generally considered a volatile period for Western Canadian labour, there were no labour disputes or strikes in garment manufacturing.

This study has served to introduce the nature of garment manufacturing in Edmonton in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The few firms in Edmonton cannot compare in number or production levels with firms in Eastern Canada but that does not reduce their significance to Alberta's history. Garment manufacturing was important within the context of the early history of Edmonton. Study of these emerging firms also provides insight into labour and legislation.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES

Manuscript Collections:

Alberta. Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Corporate Registry Division.

Alberta. Department of Labour,

Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1926, 1927, 1928. P.A.A. 70.414.952.

Correspondence received in connection with proposed New Factories Act. Sessional Paper No. 43, 1926 P.A.A. 70.414.795.

Evidence taken at a Labour Commission Enquiring into the question of a 48 hour week and 8 hour day: Edmonton, December 14, 1926. P.A.A. 70.414.860.23.

Majority Report of Commission re: 48 hours working week, February 8, 1927, Sessional Paper No. 47, P.A.A. 70.414.860.23.

Minimum Wage Act, Correspondence with members of the Board, 1924-1935; Minutes 1923-1935; Suggested Amendments to the Act, 1935; P.A.A. 75.490, P.A.A. 6.72.1.

Report of International Labour Conference, 1919, Sessional paper No.19, P.A.A. 70.414.363.

Report of the Advisory Committee under Factories Act, January 6, 1921, Sessional Paper No. 54, P.A.A. 70.414.436.

Alberta. Statutes of Alberta, 1917, 1926. "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories, Shops and Office Buildings.

Alberta. Statues of Alberta, 1922. "An Act to Provide a Minimum Wage for Women."

Alberta Federation of Labour, "Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," November 22-24, 1926, Calgary; Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour, "January 12-14, 1928, Calgary, "Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour," January 14-16, 1932, Lethbridge, P.A.A. 75.490.

Canada. Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Patents and Trademarks Division.

Reports:

Department of Labour, Government of Canada, The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada, Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1930.

Research Division, Alberta Department of Labour. A History of Labour and Social Welfare Legislation in Alberta. Edmonton, n.d. [1973?]

Scott, F.R. and H.M. Cassidy, Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry, A Report, Toronto: Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1935.

Corporate Records:

Emery Manufacturing Company

Appraisement. The Emery Company Ltd. Edmonton, Alberta. Canadian General Appraisal Company Ltd., Vancouver, B. C., 1928.

Great Western Garment Company

"Almanac," 1943., P.M.A.
"Almanac," 1946., private collection
"Fall and Winter Catalogue," n.d., private collection
"The Great Western Garment Company; 1911-1986, 75 years of quality," Don Mills: G.W.G., [1986].
"G.W.G. Limited: the history of a Western Canadian giant." unpublished company report, revised edition, 1974.
"The Plain duty of responsible men," C.A. Graham, September 5, 1923., P.M.A.
"Super Clothing for Western Canadians," Spring and Summer 1939, P.M.A.
"Super Clothing for Western Canadians," Fall and Winter 1939-1940, P.M.A.
untitled company reports 1980/81
untitled sales manual, revised 1937, P.M.A.
"Work clothing and sportswear catalogue for Fall & Winter, 1937-38,"P.M.A.
"Monthly trade letter," January 2, 1930, P.M.A.
"Monthly trade letter," January 2, 1931, P.M.A.

Interviews:

Note re: Sources

Interviews were conducted between the author and the following employees, or former employees of Edmonton's garment manufacturing firms. Existing companies were contacted to develop a list of potential sources. Company officers listed in the records of Consumer and Corporate Affairs were approached where possible to obtain names of retirees from firms that are no longer in business. The U.G.W.A. Local 120 also provided a list of individuals to approach. An advertisement in the newsletter of the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired yielded a number of contacts. More names continued to be sugggested

even after the study had been completed; these people will be contacted in further research. The interviews were recorded and are in the possession of the author.

Calgary Knitting Mills

George Lem, Glenbow-Alberta Institute

Emery Manufacturing

Dan Starko

General Whitewear and Uniform Manufacturers

Roberta Watson
Arthur McIntyre

Great Western Garment

Anne Ozipko
Lillian Morris
Max Bedard
Georgina Graff
Elizabeth Shinbine
Louis Kabesh

Hatchwear Uniforms

Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Chambers

LaFleche Bros.

LeRoy LaFleche Sr.
Ivy Grimstead

Magazines:

Farmer's Advocate, July 7, 1920.

Newspapers:

Edmonton Bulletin, 1911-1938 (selected issues)
Evening Journal, 1911 (selected issues)
Edmonton Journal, 1911-1938 (selected issues)

Directories:

Henderson's Edmonton Directories 1911-1938

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books:

Abella, Irving and David Millar, eds. The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Acton, Janice, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepherd eds, Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930. Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974.

Artibise, Alan F.J. ed., Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981.

Baker, Elizabeth Faulkner, Technology and Women's Work. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Bliss, Michael. Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business. Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1987.

Caragata, Warren. Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold. Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1979.

Cooper, Grace. The Invention of the Sewing Machine. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1968.

Corbin, Harvey A. The Men's Clothing Industry: Colonial through Modern Times. New York: Fairchild Publications, 1970.

Corderoy, Eileen. Dressmaking and Fashion. London: Dennis Dobson, 1966.

Cross, Michael S., ed. The Working man in the Nineteenth Century. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Daves, Jessica. Ready-made Miracle. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1969.

Friesen, Gerald, The Canadian Prairies: A History. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984.

Johnson, Laura C. with Robert E. Johnson. The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada. Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1982.

Kidwell, Claudia and Margaret C. Christman, Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.

Lipton, Charles. The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959. Montreal: Canadian Social Publications Ltd., 1966.

MacGregor, J. G. Edmonton: a History. 2nd ed. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975.

Palmer, Bryan D. Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1880-1980. Toronto: Butterworth & Co., 1983.

Parr, Joy, ed. Childhood and Family in Canadian History. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1982.

_____. Desegregating the Sexual Division of Labour: a Transatlantic Case Study. Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1987.

Piva, Michael, The Conditions of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979.

Popkin, Martin E. Organization, Management and Technology in the Manufacture of Men's Clothing. New York: Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1929.

Rouillard, Jacques. Les travailleurs du coton du Quebec, 1900-1915. Quebec: Presses de l'Universite du Quebec, 1974.

Seidman, Joel. The Needle Trades. New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1942-1970.

Silverman, Eliane Leslau. The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930. Montreal: Eden Press, 1984.

Stein, Leon. Out of the Sweatshop: the Struggle for Industrial Democracy. New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1977.

Thompson, J. H. Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985.

Articles:

Beaudoin-Ross, Jacqueline and Pamela Blackstock, "Costume in Canada: An Annotated Bibliography," Material History Bulletin, No 19, Spring 1984, pp. 59-91.

Bercuson, David J. "Western Labour Radicalism and the One Big Union: Myths and Realities," In S.M. Trofimenkoff ed. The Twenties in Western Canada. Ottawa: National Museum of Man Mercury Series, History Division Paper No.1, 1972, pp. 32-49.

Brandt, Gail Cuthbert, "'Weaving it Together': Life Cycle and the Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1950," Labour/Le Travailleur, 7, Spring 1981, pp. 113-125.

Klein, Alice and Wayne Roberts, "Besieged Innocence: the 'Problem' and Problems of Working Women - Toronto, 1896-1914." In Janice Acton et al eds, Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930. Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974, pp. 211-260.

Mochoruk, James D. and Donna Webber, "Women in Winnipeg Garment Trade, 1929-45," In Mary Kinnear, ed. First Days, Fighting Days Women in Manitoba History. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1987, pp.134-148.

Strong-Boag, Veronica, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur, Volume 4, Number4, 1979, pp. 131-164.

Theses and Unpublished Papers:

Acton, William R. "Labour unrest in Edmonton and District and its Coverage by the Edmonton Press 1918-1919." M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1973.

Coulter, Rebecca, "Teenagers in Edmonton, 1921-1930: Experiences of Gender and Class." PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1987.

Davidson, Nathaniel Maurice, "Montreal's Dominance of the Canadian Men's Fine Clothing Industry." M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1969.

Demoss, Dorothy Dell, "The History of Apparel Manufacturing in Texas, 1897-1981." PhD dissertation, Texas Christian University, 1981.

Dickson, Carol Anne, "Patterns for Garments: A History of the Paper Garment Pattern Industry in American to 1976." PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 1979.

Ferland, Jacques, "When the Cotton Mills 'Girls' Struck for the First Time: a Study of Female Militancy in the Cotton and Shoe Factories of Quebec (1880-1910)." Paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, 1986.

McLeod, Daniel. "Industry and Industrial Legislation in 1900-1930." M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1931.

Passero, Rosara Lucy. "Ethnicity in the Men's Ready-Made Clothing Industry, 1880-1950: the Italian Experience in Philadelphia." PhD dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1978.

Smith, Dianne. "Dressmaking Occupations in Edmonton, 1900-1930." M.Sc. thesis, University of Alberta, 1987.

Tuchscherer, T. "Fashion and the Development of the Dress Industry, 1890-1930." PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1973.